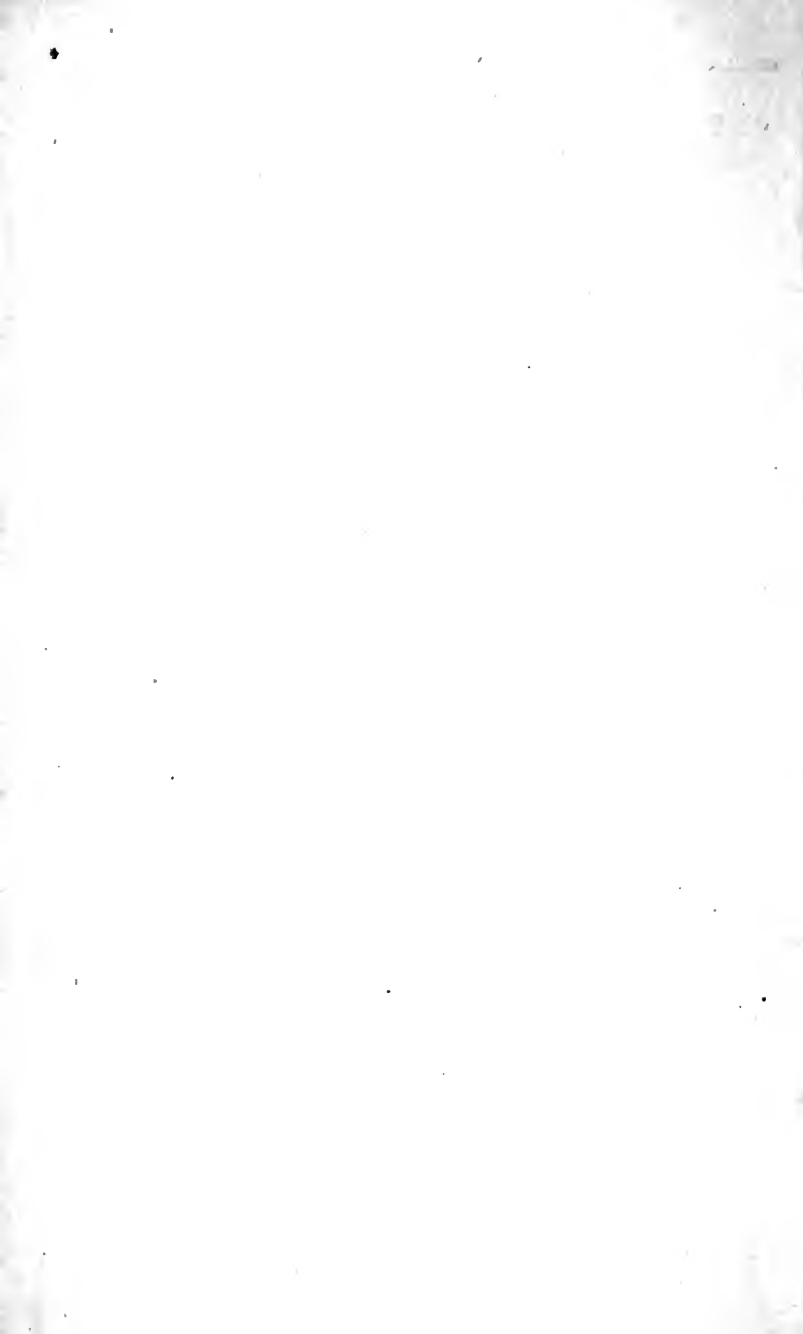


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ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

VOL. II.



ROSE AYLMER'S HOME.

“ Die Französen hasssen eine Tragödie ohne Liebe; wir jetzigen Deutschen eine Liebe ohne Tragödie.”—JEAN PAUL.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

FRIENDS IN THE MINE AND THE COUNTING-HOUSE.

So gracious a thing is it, and sweet,
In life's clear centre one true man to see,
That holds strong nature in a wise control ;
Throbbing out, all round, the heat
Of a large and liberal soul.
No shadow simulating life,
But pulses warm with human nature,
In a soul of godlike stature ;
Heart and brain all rich and rife
With noble instincts.

OWEN MEREDITH.

WE must now follow Richard Iveson on his way homeward on the night of the twelfth. Strongly persuaded that there was mischief brewing, he halted under the familiar shelter of the beech-trees, and, shielded by the wall,

he crept back to the point where the new lead had appeared, and from whence you could see all the premises surrounding the smelt-mill. The so-called cousins still lingered where he had left them; but presently they arose and came towards him—it was well they had not longer delayed their departure, or the light would have waned too far for Iveson to have watched their movements.

Closely ensconced within the shelter of the rough wall, he was soon able to listen to their conversation, and before they passed out of hearing he was *au fait* with their entire plan and purpose.

Instead, therefore, of returning home, he turned back towards the mine, to give George warning, lest the strokes of his mallet should betray his whereabouts, while the conspirators were proceeding along the level.

Entering the counting-house again, he

searched for any provisions that might be available for George ; but only a small quantity of very stale oat-cake remained in his store—the brandy he had already drained into his flask.

He passed quickly under the old archway, groping his way until he reached a turn in the passage which prevented a light being seen from the outside. He then struck a match, and proceeded at a rapid pace now that light guided his steps. As he went he noted the peculiarities of the rock and floor with a narrowness of observation which he had never applied to them hitherto, and marked the submerged portion in particular, where the blasting had detached a larger portion of the rock than usual, so as to leave a gloomy recess at the side, and an out-jutting screen towards the mine's mouth. On reaching the main chamber, he heard regular

blows of the mallet, and hastened forward, thankful indeed that he had got start of the foe.

Had he been a less cautious man, his schemes of benevolence and deep yearnings of affection had come to a sudden end on that eventful night. Many a man, knowing the mine as well as he did, would have rushed hastily on to stop the traitorous mallet blows, and never have noticed the trap-door yawning open till he was falling down the dizzy height, catching despairingly at the stemples to arrest his progress. But Iveson held his candle towards the floor, noted that the trap-door was open, and even waited to close it, before joining the self-condemned convict.

Ere he reached the "dead man," the blows stopped, and silence reigned in the far-stretching corridors of the mine. George was sitting on a detached piece of rock, wiping

his heated brow, when Iveson joined him.

“You must hide, Mr. Hilary. The blood-hounds are out.”

George made no reply, but grasping Iveson's arm he drew him towards the spot from whence his last blow had excavated a large wedge of stone. Pointing into the hollow thus formed, he watched the agent's countenance in silence. There he saw exposed some inches of the soft lime well known as bordering the edge of the veins, and a small surface sparkling like polished silver.

Iveson grasped young Hilary's hand.

“I congratulate you heartily, my friend,” he said ; “you have worked nobly, and gained a victory over yourself, at which angels will rejoice. I hold this success to be God's signature of acceptance of your work ; danger threatens, but deliverance also draws near. We will go forward, trusting in Him.”

“Do you see any hope of my father's forgiveness?”

“Not immediately ; but ultimately I feel assured of it. I find I must go away for three days ; when I return I hope to be in a position to treat for your enlargement. In the meanwhile, a detective is on your track, and he has enlisted Joseph Smith in his interest. Joseph knows your sumph as well as he knows his own staircase, and most other parts of the mine besides. The ‘old men's workings’ alone are unknown to him, and you must repair thither without loss of time. Descend the sumph quickly, and bring up any provisions you may have. I can supply you with nothing for three days.”

George saw his position at a glance. On many a recent occasion, when wearied with solitude and hard labour, he would almost have welcomed the officers of justice, but since

the gleam of that hidden ore had shone upon him, life had become marvellously dear, and liberty hovered within reach. He descended the sumph with the ease and rapidity of a cat, threw his small remnant of cheese and bread into a sack, which he tied with a rope around his waist. The hay forming his bed he tossed into a shapeless heap, secured his rug to the sack, and scrambled up again to where Iveson awaited him ; then they proceeded together.

The chamber gained, they branched off to the left, traversing a corridor like the one they had quitted for a full mile, when Iveson's narrow observation detected some rough boards in the roof of the level.

"Here you are," he said ; "that is the entrance to the ' old men's workings.'"

Fortunately one of the boards was loose, so when Iveson bade George, as the lighter man, make a stepping-stone of his back, he

was able to remove a board or two, so as to get room to enter ; he then slid to the ground again. Iveson looked anxious and perplexed, and fumbled thoughtfully in his pocket.

“What are you wanting ?” asked George.

“A bit of chalk to draw you a map of the workings, and, alas ! I have none.”

“I have, though,” and he gave him the chalk.

Iveson began to draw on the surface of the rock.

“Here is the old level which you enter from that hole,” he said ; “it runs at right angles with this corridor. You must follow it for about fifty fathoms, and then turn down a branch to the left. If you are very hard beset, take refuge in an old sumph—it is dangerous, but you are light and sure-footed. The descent is made by foot-holes in the rock, and the ground is safe enough at the bottom.

There is an old boring close by, into which the water has broken; it is just possible to pass alongside of the pool, and by so doing you reach a larger cavity, where there is plenty of room for a bed, secure hiding, and a good supply of water. Don't take to the water-hole unless hard pressed, for there a false step might be fatal. You have provision for three days, a rope, and a rug, and here is a coil of string, a flask of brandy, and some candles. Now, be very cautious, and may God bless you!"

George wrung his hand, then sprang on his back, seized the rocky shelf above, swung loosely for a moment, then gradually disappeared up the opening, replaced the boards, which Iveson handed to him, and then each went on his way.

Richard Iveson had regained the main level, and was pressing onwards towards the outer

world, when the echoing sound of footsteps fell upon his ear. He crept softly to the submerged part, extinguished his candle, and ensconced himself behind the stony screen already mentioned. There he watched till the opportunity occurred of depriving the spies of their light, and he remained concealed till the last reverberation of their retreating footsteps died upon his ear. Then he, too, emerged from the mine, and repaired to his home by a somewhat circuitous route, selected because it led in a different direction to that which Smith would traverse.

Arrived at home, Iveson took a bath, donned what Barbara called his "Sunday clothes," wrote a note to Alice, which he secured to a stone, and tossed in at her open window; and then, harnessing his good horse to his trap, he awoke Nancy, and told her he was going a journey, and should not be back

for a day or two. She rubbed her eyes, asked where he was going, and while waiting for the answer, which never came, she dropped asleep again. And Iveson drove down the lovely mountain road in the fresh morning, while the dew glittered on branch and blossom, and the larks rained down clear notes of harmony as they rose into the cloudless sky. All nature smiled, for peace and gladness seemed diffused over its fair face, and the outward peace penetrated to the inmost soul of the traveller, and amalgamating with the deeper peace within, shed a hopeful light on all that his spirit looked upon. His whole being on that sunny morning was possessed by one image—that of a fair, hazel-eyed girl. For her he had planned and toiled many a weary day and night; to raise a smile on her lips he had worked over hours, often with aching limbs and weary head; for her sake he had left his

beloved books, his familiar den, and was lodging above a stable ; for her sake he was now starting on a long and complicated journey, and placing all his goods and his very character in jeopardy. But since he had known her life had been a different thing to him ; his former life had seemed not worth the living, and future life without her loomed as an intolerable punishment, one that he could not bear to dwell on. A far different image flits phantom-like before his mental vision, as he inhales the fresh breeze, and experiences the exhilarating effects of the morning air ; he sees her as she was yesterday, striving to please him, ministering to him, and making his wants her care. Such she is in his glad memory—what she is in his imaginings he dare not define.

He reaches Swaleford in time for the first train, and takes a ticket for Edinburgh.

There he arrives in the afternoon and hurries off at once to Dr. Samson's house, giving more heed to the safety of a case of pictures than to his own. Alas ! Dr. Samson is not at home, and is not expected till seven o'clock, his dinner-hour. Iveson is perplexed, for he had intended to proceed to Glasgow by the six-o'clock train ; but that is now impossible, and he must wait in patience.

Seven strikes, and eight, and nine, and Dr. Samson is still absent, so Richard is obliged to give up the attempt of proceeding to Glasgow that night. But Dr. Samson comes at last, and greets his friend as cordially as ever. He is charmed with Elsie's pictures, and at once becomes a purchaser, delighted with the progress of the old gentleman's wound, and exultant over the prospects of the mine. The friends sit up late conversing eagerly, and when they part, Iveson has ne-

gotiated the placing of George with the famous doctor as an apprentice, and has twenty pounds in his pocket for Elsie.

On to Glasgow by the first train in the morning, and to Buchanan Street with all speed. But disappointment awaits him here, for Mr. Kennedy's family is at the coast, and he is spending the day with them to celebrate his wife's birthday. Iveson chafes at the delay, but immediately resolves to push forward. He regains the railway station, and books himself for Helensburgh.

His heart warms at the sight of the noble river all studded with vessels of every degree, from the man-of-war to the ferry steamer. But he is too impatient to give way to enthusiasm, and he looks oftener at his watch than at the flowing Clyde.

The bourne is gained ; a railway porter directs him to the house occupied by his old

school friend, and he joins the family party at the early dinner, just about the same hour as Smith and Jif Coates enter the mine.

Iveson is greeted with delight by his host and with cordiality by the hostess, who knows him well through his letters and her husband's vivid description. Mr. Kennedy will give his business full consideration, and account himself fortunate if he finds he can serve his first friend, but—"Dick must eat first and drink his wife's health."

Iveson yielded to the very reasonable requirements of his friend, and bore the prolongation of the dinner hour with as good a grace as possible, but it was an infinite relief to him when Mrs. Kennedy and her children withdrew and left him free to unburden his mind.

"Now, old fellow, what do you want?" inquired Mr. Kennedy.

“A thousand pounds in the shortest possible time.”

Mr. Kennedy pulled a long face as he asked,
“What security have you to offer?”

Richard drew a bundle of papers from his pocket.

“These,” he said, “are the-title deeds of a small farm of a dozen or so acres ; selling price, £500.”

“And for the rest?”

“I have only personal security. The case stands thus—we have found lead, but we have no capital to work the mine. One vein crops out to the day, that will be worked at a very slight cost, and we shall repay our debts within the year.”

Producing a pencil and paper, he hastily sketched the mine and the veins, including the Beechwood one, and passed the sketch to his friend.

Mr. Kennedy considered the matter carefully.

“Do I understand that these papers belong to the land where the lead crops out?”

“Yes, they do.”

“And you conscientiously believe the ore to be good and plentiful?”

“I do.”

“Then I will lend £1,000 on this security.”

Iveson grasped his friend's hand.

“Will you give me the order at once?” he asked, earnestly.

Mr. Kennedy looked perplexed.

“You are very mysterious, Iveson. Surely there must be a lady in the case?”

“Yes, there is doubtless a lady, and such a lady! I would tell you all about it, dear old fellow, if other people's secrets were not so closely mixed up with it. You will, how-

ever, take my word that nothing but absolute necessity would compel me thus to fly from you."

"You will stay all night, of course, Iveson?"

"Oh! no, indeed, I cannot, I must travel to London by this night's train. There is no use in my returning home until I have seen a person in London, and I am sorely needed at this very time in Botcherdale."

Ay, Richard Iveson, you do not know how sorely!

Mr. Kennedy sighed.

"I hate to part with you, Dick; but, if it be as you say, the most friendly thing is to speed you on your way. I will give you the order at once, and you shall start by the seven o'clock train, which will take you to Glasgow in abundant time for the night mail."

As he placed the bank order in his friend's hand, Iveson said with a smile,

“What if I am deliberately cheating you, Kennedy? What if the new vein of lead be a myth?”

His friend looked grave.

“I have succeeded well in my business, but I have several children, Dick, and I should ill like to throw £500 away. But if you were to cheat me, I should sustain a still heavier loss, even that of the only friend I have loved from my boyhood.”

His brow cleared as he continued,

“But why conjure up painful imaginations? Your word is as safe as the Clydesdale Bank; go and prosper, my boy; win the mysterious lady, and bring her here for the honeymoon.”

Iveson raised his hands deprecatingly.

“Oh! you do not know what she is! I have not dared to try to win her, she is so infinitely my superior, but she is very kind to me.”

“Phoo, phoo, don’t be a coward of all things, Dick. Finish your expedition, and make your proposal. Don’t you know, ‘Faint heart never won fair lady.’ You are a likely fellow enough, and have a good chance in life. If your Botcherdale mines won’t support you, come here, and I’ll secure you a good opening. Don’t hesitate to ask the lady, for she is not likely to get a better fellow. Next to trusting in God, it is requisite to trust in oneself.”

And Iveson brooded over his words during all the night-long journey, and ere he reached London had almost promised himself to risk all and propose to Alice, as soon as the clouds now gathering round her home should have dispersed. He little guessed with what a terrible storm those clouds must be scattered.

CHAPTER II.

LORD DUNGARRET NOT AT HOME.

O vanity of vanities,
How wayward the decrees of fate are !
How very weak the very wise,
How very small the very great are !

Methinks the text is never stale,
And life is every day renewing
Fresh comments on the old, old tale
Of folly, fortune, glory, ruin.

THACKERAY.

A gentleman stands at the door of an aristocratic residence in Clarges Street, and asks the liveried servant, who cautiously opens the door without removing the chain, for his master, Lord Dungarret ; receiving, in reply, a curt negative.

“Not at home again !” says the stranger wearily. “This is the second day that I am kept in London for no other purpose than to see his Lordship, and it is a grievous inconvenience to me. Will you give him this note, which explains the business I am come upon, and I will call again in an hour’s time.”

To his surprise the man drew back, and shut the door without taking in the billet ; and he was then heard laughing in the hall, as if he had achieved some triumphant piece of generalship.

Poor Iveson turned into Piccadilly, crossed the street, and entered the Green Park. What could he do ? Here he was kept by a nobleman’s caprice hanging about London, when poor George might be starving in the water-hole. He had barely provision for three days, and this was the fourth !

At last, in his sore perplexity, he deter-

mined to apply to a policeman ; and he examined the countenance of each one he met, till he saw one promising at once intelligence and courtesy. To him he explained that he had come to London on pressing business, probably of life or death, and that he could not gain the interview which was the object of his errand.

The policeman reflected.

“ I should think from all you say that the nobleman is in fear of an execution.”

“ A nobleman ! Is it possible ?”

The policeman smiled benevolently at the greenness of the stranger.

“ More than possible, sir,” he said condescendingly. “ I should almost call it the normal condition of young aristocrats.”

“ What then shall I do ?”

“ Speak to the first person that you see emerging from the house. You may catch

the nobleman himself ; if you choose to tell me his name, I can probably describe him to you."

"But will it do him no injury?"

"Not the least."

"Lord Dungarret."

"Ah ! I thought so. You will only see him at night, and that by chance, unless you wait till Sunday ; on that day he may give you an interview."

"I dare not wait so long. It might cost a life."

"Then go back to the house, and tell the servant you will return on Sunday. Look knowing and wink, and say, 'Honour bright, I am a true friend ;' then withdraw, go quite away, and remain quiet till dark. About ten o'clock come back again, watch the house without being seen, and address his lordship if he emerges. He is tall and very slight,

wears a pointed beard of fair, soft hair, and looks altogether more like a French count than an English baron."

Richard thanked the man for his counsel, and proceeded to act his part. His heart was heavy, for he had now lost the chance of travelling by the night-train, and what might not poor George be suffering!

At ten o'clock he took up his post in Clarges Street, and waited. Presently a man answering in appearance to the description given by the policeman came rapidly up the street from Piccadilly. As he laid his hand on the knocker of the house in question, Iveson addressed him.

"Lord Dungarret, I believe?"

The slight man smiled, and bowed.

"I am sorry," he said, in tones of exquisite politeness, "that I have not the honour of being able to name you as you do me."

“My name is Richard Iveson. I am a stranger to your lordship. I come on the part of young Mr. Hilary, and am prepared to refund what he—he—borrowed from your lordship.”

“Ah! very honourable. Dare I ask you to wait here till I speak to my steward? It seems inhospitable, but—I have diphtheria in my house, and if you took it I should never know another happy moment.”

“I fear your lordship means to give me the slip,” said Richard, coldly.

“Mr. Iveson, 'pon my honour,” replied the man of the tender heart, “you do me grievous wrong. I might prove it by taking you in with me, but my conscience would not allow me to run such a risk; permit me to enter.”

He gave a long low rap, and the door flew open; he glided in, and, as it closed behind

him, Iveson's heart sank, and he felt again utterly baffled.

He waited for twenty minutes, and was fast losing all hope, when he saw a short dark man coming towards him.

"Come with me to your hotel, sir," he said. "We can get a private room there to settle our business in and no danger of diphtheria. I have never been near the patient, my lord bid me tell you, and you need have no fear of me."

"I should have had none in any case," replied Iveson, with an unmistakeable shade of contempt in his tone. "I suppose you are Lord Dungarret's steward?"

"Yes, sir, that is my hoffice."

When seated in the "private room," the *hoffice* in question proceeded to claim double the sum gained by the forgery, as the price of my lord's withdrawal of the charge against

Mr. George Hilary. Iveson was dismayed, and resisted the claim, for how could they begin to get lead if no money remained for machinery? He contested the point stoutly.

“Look you,” he said, “Mr. George Hilary is penniless, and his father is little better. Even if he wished to help his son, he could not raise a hundred pounds to give him, and he is so enraged at his conduct that he does not wish to do so. If he knew about him what I do, he would most probably give him up to justice. Lord Dungarret has spies about seeking him. I happen to know that they are very unlikely to find him, and even if they did, they could get no money from him. Now, as his friend, and for other reasons of my own, I am ready to pay five hundred pounds for that forged bill which lies on the table there—nay, as his lordship has lost some interest, and been at some cost, I

shall not object to pay six hundred pounds, but more I will not give. Lord Dungarret wants money badly enough, from all accounts—he would be more stupid than he looks if he refused six hundred pounds.”

“But, sir, you forget the disgrace that a public prosecution would bring.”

“No, I don’t. That is what I offer the six hundred pounds for, and I shall not offer more.”

So the steward accepted the six hundred pounds, and Iveson carried away poor George’s forged cheque.

It was past midnight when he reached his hotel, and, as there was no possibility of proceeding north till ten o’clock in the morning, he took that which he was much in need of, namely, a good night’s rest.

CHAPTER III.

THE WATERHOLE.

Hope on ! the worst of storms will pass away,
 Hold fast thy helm, howe'er the billows flow,
 Time at his wheel can turn all in one day,
 And write *hic jacet* on thy deadliest foe.
 Thou nam'st all friends. Thou think'st they'll ne'er forsake ;
 Mayst hold their kindness for thy dearest hoard,
 But sweetest flowers can hide a deathful snake.
 Need proves thy friends, O youth, as war thy sword.

HOLLINGSWORTH.

WE left Joseph Smith and Coates in the mine,
 digesting the astounding discovery that a vein
 of lead had been exposed by unknown hands.
 Each endeavoured to solve the mystery in the
 way most harmonious with his own character,

and the knowledge he possessed, and reasoning on different premises, arrived, as was natural, at different conclusions.

Smith being suspicious of the whereabouts of young Hilary, and having boundless faith in the all-pervading power of self-interest, felt assured that Iveson had concealed the fugitive in the mine, on condition of his aiding him in opening a way to the expected vein. This opinion corroborated his later impression, that the person who knocked him down in the level was none other but Iveson, and against him he vowed a fierce revenge.

Jif Coates had been drinking, and his worst passions were in a highly inflammable state. Smith's insinuation, false in its spirit as he himself knew it to be, about foreign labour, had acted as a match to the hay-rick, and Jif's whole soul was in a blaze. He was the first to break the long silence.

"Come with me, Joseph Smith," he said. "We'll search t' mine fra ane end to t'other, and if I find any o' t' blasted furriners lurking about, we'll gie 'em sike a licking as they'll remember better than t' lead."

"I'll come wi' ye, an' welcome, Jif ; but I shan't write 'sattled' to my bill till I gets a good bat at that sneak Iveson. He'll ha made a good job o' this, I'll apod."

"Iveson 'll have a heavy reckoning wi' t' Botcherdle lads ! He'll be wise to cut and run, but he an't good at that trade, Iveson isn't. But come your ways, Mr. Smith, we'll go down t' nigh hand sumph first."

They scrambled down, Jif descending at a much faster rate than the less practised keeper ; they found a bundle of hay, and both regarded it searchingly.

Jif turned it over and over, until Smith asked with a harsh laugh if he was looking

for a needle in it. The miner replied that he hoped to find a bone or a crust to be a guide to them as to whether the place had been inhabited by the "furriners."

"Is that what ye want to know, lad?" exclaimed Smith; "yon shutter will answer ye faster than t' hay."

He pointed to the shutter which Richard had affixed to make the miniature cave into a store-room.

Jif flew at the cupboard, tore down the door, trampled it with his heavy shoes till it split in various places, then he broke it with his hands, careless that the nails inflicted painful wounds, and flung the whole into the water. Then he clambered up the sumph again, and hastening onward, left Smith to re-adjust the trap-door.

Clank, clank, went the iron heels against the iron of the tramway; there might be

difficulty in keeping up with the angry speed of the jealous miner, but there was none in ascertaining his whereabouts. Smith followed him to the central chamber, and along the second right-hand corridor, and down sumphs, and along ledges, and up strange crevices; but they found no more signs of habitation than the bundle of hay had already revealed.

The centre corridor was long, extending for two miles southwards, and communicating with an opening in the rock, facing another valley which ran at right angles to Botcherdale. Here there were branching passages and sumphs in abundance, each of which was minutely searched, and each proved utterly barren of testimony. As they reached the opening, Smith observed that the sun was setting, and insisted that he must go his rounds now, to satisfy his masters.

“We'll come again to-morn, Jif,” he said

coaxingly. "Get thee home now, lad, and we'll have a better bout to-morn, and a fresh comrade."

"Thee get home, Mr. Smith," replied his coadjutor. "Jif Coates 'll bide at t'mine mouth. It's like t'furriners don't ken this here cat-hole, so I mun watch at t'main mouth. It wad be over fond to stove t'wasps nest, and not stop up t'door. Nay, my lads, Jif 'll fettle ye tidier than that."

So Smith returned home to his supper just as Richard Iveson took his place in the railway-carriage for London.

In the meanwhile, Alice Hilary had paid a visit to poor dying Polly, and hearing from Hannah a confused but dismal account of the sufferings of "Joseph's cousin," she advised him to try the Turkish bath at Swaleford, assuring him that Mike Pedley had experienced wonderful benefit from it.

Even as she spoke, Mike entered, a strong-built hale man, a splendid specimen of a yeoman. He was a prime favourite of Iveson's, and his manly yet respectful tone denoted qualities in common with the highly-educated dalesman.

Alice called in his experience to aid her arguments, begging him to tell Mr. Gray all about his cure.

"Well, sir and miss," said Pedley, "young Mr. Iveson spak and spak aboot this bath, and was that set on me trying it that I consented, and he tuk me in his own trap to t'town. So I went into t'bath-house, and they put me into a room that was ever so hot. It made one feel queerish, but I wasn't afeared. I hadn't got my clothes on, begging your pardon, miss, for saying so, and I tuk a chair nigh hand t'stove, for, says I, if t'heat's to do one good, t'hotter t'better. Well, it was

warmish, I will assure you, and I brak out in such a sweat that when I rubbed my hand down my legs it fair went in a slush on to t'floor. I stopped half an hour, until I sat in a pool, and it wasn't as clean as I could ha' liked it to be, it a'most seemed as if it fetched t'dirt out o' my very bones. Then they telled me to come out, and I went to where it was fresher, and I sat me down again, and cold watter came all over me, and then they rubbed me, and then more watter cam. Oh, it made me feel pure ! Then I had to bide still for a time, and after that I comed away ; and, if you'll believe me, miss, and you, sir, t'pain was clean gone out o' my knees, and I felt that strength that I'd ha' liever walked home than have rode in t' carriage, only it would ha' been a disrespec to t'master. Oh, them baths are fine things, they are !”

Of course Mr. Edmund Gray had heard of Turkish baths ; but he had never been in a position to mark what he heard. Now, with his limbs tortured with pain, and his mind eager for action, he caught gladly at the idea of relief ; and before Alice left the Raven's Nest she and Pedley had concocted a plan for getting Gray down to Swaleford on the morrow.

Elsie returned home with a lightened heart. She fully relied on Iveson's promise to return in three, or at most four days. He would be back to-morrow night at latest, and then her anxiety would be relieved.

This happy circumstance of the rheumatism and the Turkish bath would keep the most powerful foe from the field, and by Friday the protector would be at his post again. Smith and Gray both understood Alice's simple tactics perfectly, but the former was not un-

willing to wait Iveson's return, as his principal object was to revenge himself upon him ; and Gray was physically unable for any action which required agility, so he was glad enough to take any means that would restore his powers. Thus Thursday passed with no more annoyance to George Hilary than the occasional echo of Jif's iron heels, as he patrolled the mine, and the pain of gnawing hunger.

On Thursday night Elsie waited in intense anxiety, watching the opening of the lane, in earnest hope that Iveson would emerge from it. But she waited till utter darkness shrouded every object, and the sight of her friend did *not* gladden her eyes. What was now to be done ? She re-perused Richard's letter, which she had found on her floor on awakening on the morning of the thirteenth—Garthdale, yes, she knew Garthdale ; she could walk so far quite well, and the rough sketch of the

mine would be guide enough to lead her to the place of George's retreat. Her resolution was soon taken ; she wished her father good-night, and heard him enter his bedroom ; then she arrayed herself in her plainest dress, divesting herself entirely of crinoline, and with a kerchief tied over her bonnet, and a garden-basket, containing bread and meat, on her arm, she sallied forth into the night.

There was light enough to show her the beaten cart-road over into Garthdale, and she trod it rapidly, and felt no fear. But when she left the familiar ground behind her, and descended into the strange valley, her nerve became less firm, and every startled cry of the grouse or plover caused her heart to beat painfully.

And now she must leave the trodden path, and follow the course of the brook flowing from the left. This became increasingly

difficult, for there was no path, and her progress along the broken rocks and boulders, which crowded both the bed of the stream and its margin, was at once arduous and painful. Several times she fell, bruising herself considerably against the rocks, but still she plodded onwards, struggling through the briars, wading the stream when her position on the left bank became untenable, and recrossing when the right bank became precipitous. She progressed slowly, and fatigue and anxiety, often made her heart sink.

The country becomes more barren ; thistles and hay-green garnish the rubbly border of the stream instead of brushwood, the rocks grow higher and more stern in form, and at length she, feeling her way along their base, finds the much-desired opening. Here she strikes a match and lights a candle, and with it enters the disused level.

She ventures to sit and rest for a little while, studying the directions in Iveson's letter; then bracing herself to renewed energy, she presses onward till she gains the chamber. Here she is startled by the sound of footsteps; she listens carefully, and ascertains that they proceed from the main level. She springs forward to gain the corridor leading to the "old men's workings," and bounds along it at a wonderful speed, her light footfalls awakening no echoes. She observes with relief that this corridor is more circuitous in its direction than the one she saw on her first visit with her father, and so hopes that the sound of her foe's approach will reach her long before her light can betray her to him.

Again she consults Iveson's letter, lifting her eyes from it to the rough hewn roof, and espying at last the boarded opening already familiar to us. Here she paused, crying

softly, "George! dear George!" and then she waited a little and cried again.

The boards in the roof are drawn aside, and a pallid face looks down.

"Oh! Elsie, my brave Elsie! what danger you incur! But your errand is not heedless, for I am truly starving."

"Here is food, my own brother," replied the girl, holding the basket as high above her head as was possible. "Reach it quickly, if you can, for some one is coming."

"I cannot reach it; and if I descend I cannot return. Wait, here is Iveson's string; tie this end round the handle of the basket, I will draw it up."

She obeyed him in all haste, and the basket disappeared. A moment, and it descended empty.

"How shall you get home, my darling?" asked the voice from above.

"The same way that I came. By the Garthdale opening."

"But the distance! You will faint on the road. Some one is watching in the mine; but if you can have the luck on reaching the chamber to hear his echoes in one of the corridors, pray return by the main level, it will save you miles of walking. And, Elsie, here, catch this piece of bread and meat, you may be delayed, and be thankful of it—hunger is such pain!"

At this moment the well-known echo of clanking footsteps reached their ear.

"Go further on," George whispered; "there are some recesses there where you may hide in safety; and when he has passed, try for the main level. God bless you, darling."

Elsie sped onward, reached a part of the corridor where the crags stood out along the side in sharp ledges, and ensconcing herself in

one of the hollows, she extinguished her candle and waited the result.

Jif came slowly along the corridor, examining the roof carefully as he reached the spot which Elsie had just left ; he paused and noted it with close observation. Happily George had replaced the boards, and stolen softly away in the direction of the water-hole.

“ If he’s up there,” soliloquised Jif, “ he can’t come down, that’s sartin’ ; or rayther that if he comes down he can’t get up again. There’s nothing partickler about them ‘ old men’s workings,’ except t’ watter hole, and it’s over ugly a place for a lad to gang to with hissell. I’ll bide here a bit, and hearken, anyhow, for one can hear any noise fra t’ ‘ old men ’ very fair here.”

The corridor was very dry, so Jif stuck his candle against the rock by means of a ball of

wet clay, which acted as a candlestick, and forthwith seating himself, fell into a cat-sleep.

Elsie waited quietly for some time, and then she essayed to move from her place, hoping to be able to pass him without disturbing his slumber; but at her first movement he started and shouted "Hollo!" then he listened carefully, and subsiding into quietness again, murmured, "nobbut a rat," and dozed afresh.

It was a terrible waiting for the poor over-wearied girl. The strength of her purpose supported her, otherwise she must have fainted speedily. But she thought of George, certain that she could not betray herself without increasing the suspicion of his hiding-place; and she thought of her father, and trembled lest the morning should be far enough advanced before her return to reveal her absence to him. Bitter as her thoughts were, they took

no effect on the unconscious Jif, who crouched there hour after hour, only arousing himself with a shake when Elsie was sure the alarm must have been given at Thorny Hall, and proceeding noisily towards the chamber, whither Elsie followed him, without lighting her candle. Her heart beat wildly; if he would enter one or other corridor, she could at once betake herself either to the main level or the disused one by which she had entered; what then was her dismay when, as Jif emerged, voices greeted him in the chamber, and she recognised those of Gray and Mr. Smith!

“Now, mates,” said the latter, with a coarse laugh, “I hope you are in good wind, for we’re likely to get a tidy run. Let me bide here, and do you two search t’passages one by one, t’sumphs and all. I’ve got a bonny dinner wi’ me, and I invite you all to this here hall at one o’clock. When we’ve search’d t’ mine

thro' we'll away to t'old men's workings, and if we don't find our folks even there, we'll treat 'em to a bit o' blasting, for practice sake."

The proposal was accepted, and Jif and Gray began their work at the right-hand corridor. Poor Elsie watched and waited, but Smith lit his pipe and smoked away in perfect peace, and she stole back to warn George, and eat what he had given her, to fortify her against what might occur.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SEARCH.

When sudden here a monstrous cave he found,
Hewn out with labour in the stony ground:
Full thirty cubits deep it seemed to show:
A fair and lofty gate appeared below.
While here in deep suspense the traitor stood,
The cautious virgin, who his steps pursu'd,
Fearful to lose the track, still kept in view
Her faithless guide, and near the cavern drew.

HOOLE's Translation of *Orlando Furioso*.

THE detective and his coadjutor, Jif Coates, searched each corridor of the mine in its turn. Gray would stay to examine the roof and walls as he went on, but this irritated Jif beyond endurance.

“What a fuss and a fash ye make, man,” he said scornfully, “one wad think you was a housemaid, and was seeking for spider’s webs, lest t’misses should flight ye. Don’t ye ken that I’ve wrought i’ this mine sin I was a lad, and I ken every hole, both in’t roof or in’t floor. If ye go surveying that gait it ’ll be midnight afore we get we’re dinner, and as for’t furriners we shan’t come at them till Kissamus.”

“My good friend, nothing is lost by care and accuracy. I don’t doubt your familiarity with the mine, but if we were to overlook one recess, we might miss our man.”

So the search progressed slowly, and Jif’s temper did not increase in coolness. Smith began to find it tedious; he waited longer than he liked for his dinner, and Elsie hoped he would move away, but her hope was illusive. He solaced himself by a secret

attack on the cold meat, soliloquising, "Well, my lads, if you won't keep to time, you must pay my loss in victuals."

When his comrades appeared, he made no mention of his little luncheon, but proceeded on the equitable principle of "share and share alike," and all felt it to be perfectly satisfactory. One more corridor must now be examined, and then they would proceed to the "old men's working."

Smith proposed that Jif should now remain as sentry, but he refused to do so.

"No, no," he said; "I'll be the first to have it out with the furriners."

And now Elsie flies to the recesses where she spent the night, for the enemy is about to enter the corridor. She wonders what time it is—judging by her feelings twenty-four hours at least must have passed since she came into the mine, but, in reality, it was

little more than half that time. Her hearing has become supernaturally acute, and, though she dare not look out, she hears them plant a ladder under the opening in the roof, she hears them push the boards aside, and she hears the rubbing of Jif's corduroy garments against the edges of the narrow aperture ; then he invites his friends to follow him.

“Nay,” replied Smith ; “It'll never do for us all to gang into t' warren, who can tell whether our bird mayn't escape another way ? If Jif won't bide here to watch, why I will.”

But Gray was not willing for this to pass into a law.

“You really must come, Smith,” he said ; “Coates gets so self-willed and cross-grained, that I can't go through such queer places as you describe with him alone. I have absolute need of you to help me to serve my warrant.”

“ Well, I’ll not leave t’rat hole unguarded, that’s poz.”

Jif growled discontentedly, but finding that the others were resolute, and that business was at a stand-still, he shoved himself out of the aperture, and consented to remain as sentry. So poor Elsie’s hopes died away again, and her fears for George redoubled.

Jif has smoked three pipes, and still sits puffing on the ladder, when steps are heard returning along the “old men’s” track. Elsie’s heart stops beating as a head is protruded through the aperture, and Smith’s harsh voice exclaims,

“ We’ve sought everywhere except in t’watter hole, and we’re forced to come to you to help us there ; it’s an awkward place to go spekkylating in.”

Jif chuckled triumphantly, and soon disappeared through the opening. Elsie waited

till both lights and steps had vanished, then she lit her own candle, threw down the ladder, and rushed along the corridor. Love and fear gave strength to her limbs, and guided her bruised feet along the rough road, and she passed the chamber, and entered the main level without pausing for a second. Meanwhile, the trio reach the entrance to the water hole, and Jif scrambles in, working his way down, with his back against one side of the old sump and his knees against the other, with marvellous rapidity. Arrived at the foot of this curious stair, he lifts his torch above his head, and examines the rocky roof and sides. Nothing seems different from the usual appearance, and the water bubbles in with as dreary a sound as ever. Without waiting for his comrades, who are descending with less agility, he proceeds to the narrow passage leading to the inner cave; he scrambles along

the rocky shelf, regardless of the deep water at the left hand, and as he advances he sees a dark form crouching in the furthest corner ; in an instant he springs upon him, exclaiming,

“ Ye nazzardly thief, I’ll learn ye to come taking t’honest bread out o’ t’ Botcherdale lads’ mouths.”

George, surprised at first by the sudden rush of his adversary, was off his guard, and fell to the ground, but he struggled fiercely to rise, and soon succeeded in doing so. Jif clung to him, planting a blow or a kick whenever he could manage to do so, and the combatants writhed in their savage embrace to the very edge of the deep dark water.

Smith and Gray are cautiously creeping along the ledge as this scene is being enacted, and Smith cries out in horror :

“ Jif, you fool, take your hands off ! That’s no furriner, but t’proprietor’s son.”

But his cry was too late, the miner and the gentleman rolled into the water together.

“Lord ha’ mercy !” exclaimed Smith.
“Is there ever a rope hereabouts ?”

His eye fell on the one tied to the sack which poor George had brought with him, and he flung that into the water, securing the other end safely. The two men rose to the surface, still tightly clasped together. Jif’s fury had been gathering force all these days ; Smith’s assertion about the “proprietor’s son” had conveyed no idea to his mind, and his resolution now was, that having failed to kill his adversary by blows, he would drown him. As they rose, George seized the rope, but Jif struck his hand so violently as to force him to loose his hold, and the two sank again.

Among Joseph Smith’s faults, the lack of personal courage could not be reckoned ; he threw off his coat and heavy shoes, and tied

the rope round his waist, and, as the two rose for the third time, he sprang into the water, and seized George's jacket with a powerful grasp ; Jif was now too much exhausted to thwart his efforts, so he held firm, while Gray dragged them to the edge of the rock, and helped him to haul them up.

While this scene is enacting, Elsie speeds along the main level, but her progress is checked by the loud echoes of horses' hoofs ; she remembers the manner of her first entrance into the mine, and has just time to regain the chamber before a waggon arrives there. Her relief on seeing that it contains Richard Iveson and her father exceeds the power of description. For a moment she forgets poor George in her eager welcome of her father, and the colonel seems as if the whole object of his search was attained in finding her ; but in a few moments she turns to Iveson, and,

clasping his hand in both of hers, she exclaims :

“ Dear Mr. Iveson, you have come to us in our sore need ; Mr. Smith, Mr. Gray, and Jif Coates have just gone down to the water-hole.”

Iveson started. In that moment of agitation he dared once to raise her hand to his lips, but the words he spoke were not those of tenderness, but of practical use.

“ Jif Coates ! the last man for a job of this kind. Truer heart never beat in human bosom than in his !”

“ Perhaps so. But Smith has convinced him that foreign workmen have been employed for the ‘ dead work,’ and he is infuriated.”

“ I see it all. Come with me, Pedley,” he said to the stout man that had driven the horse ; “ we must be off to the water-hole.

Miss Hilary, you and your father will be more comfortable in remaining here."

They did as he desired, glad of the opportunity of conversing, though pausing at short intervals to listen with intense anxiety for any sound indicative of the success of their friend. But no sound came.

Colonel Hilary explained how terribly he had suffered in his vain effort to find his lost darling. How he had walked to the "Raven's Nest," and ridden to the village, and raised the whole country side. He said he was hopeless till Iveson arrived, and, on hearing how matters stood, expressed a firm persuasion that he was safe in the mine. He said they would have had a mob of Botcherdale people to accompany them to the mine, but that Iveson had bidden back all except Pedley. He told how the agent had broken to him all the sad story of poor George, his reckless extra-

vagance, his daring crime, his thorough repentance, and his effort at atonement, and gladdened Elsie's heart by a promise of full forgiveness. Then he paused suddenly, and exclaimed—

“They linger long—I am getting alarmed; let us go towards these ‘old men’s workings.’”

Elsie would not oppose, though she saw her father had had more exertion already than he was able for, so she led him to where the ladder leaned against the opening. The colonel essayed to ascend, but his strength failed; he stepped short of the rung of the ladder, staggered, and fell heavily to the ground, with a cry of unutterable anguish. Alice tried to raise him, but every effort at motion seemed to cause him such terrible suffering, that she desisted, and stood as if paralysed with horror. Her father was so patient; she had seen him so sorely tried, and yet so

brave and cheerful, that now, when his groans echoed through the dark corridor, she knew how intense must be the pain that called them forth. Oh ! would George and Mr. Iveson never come, and help her to succour the tortured one ?

As she had waited near that very spot in the early morning, dreading that even then her father was enduring the alarm of her absence, she had asked herself if time had ever gone by on such a leaden wing ; again in the afternoon, when the spies were searching the “ old men’s workings,” and all external help had seemed beyond reach, she had wondered if it were possible to compress a greater amount of suspense and mental agony into the same length of time ; and now, as she watched beside her father, counting the minutes by his groans, she knew that her former anxieties had been light compared with this.

She knelt on the cold rough stones, and with clasped hands she poured forth an agonised prayer for succour to Him whose sight could penetrate the darkest recesses, even of the water-hole, and whose power is not limited by human possibilities.

As she knelt thus, her lips pallid, and her forehead covered with the dew wrung forth by her intense mental anguish, she heard noises in the distance. She listened eagerly—were they in the “old men’s workings,” or did they proceed from the chamber? Sometimes she thought the former was the case—sometimes she decided for the latter. At last she came to the conclusion that both suppositions were true, for there were certainly voices in the chamber, and soon a pair of legs protruded from the trap-door above, kicked about till they made sure of their footing on the ladder, and then descended to the floor. A

head was protruded next, and then the voice of Richard Iveson said :

“Colonel, are you there?”

“Ay, and badly hurted, I’m afeard!” exclaimed Pedley, who was now standing by him; “and miss is in a dead faint,”—for when help was at hand Alice’s strength had given way.

“It is all right, colonel,” said Iveson, in his gentlest tone. “Your son is here, but he has had a severe ducking, and is much exhausted. But he has nothing the matter with him, so you must not be alarmed.”

He made a signal to Pedley, who half-ascended the ladder, and received in his arms the shivering form of George Hilary. Placed upon the floor, he could hardly stand, so Pedley led him to where he could lean against the wall. This brought him close to Alice, and he took her hand. The cold clammy

touch recalled the fainting girl to her senses, and, as she opened her eyes and saw the dark arches of the corridor and the awed and pallid faces illumined by the flaring candles, she wondered for a moment where she was ; but a groan from her father aroused her memory of all the misery of their position, and she threw her arms round George and hid her eyes on his shoulder.

He, too, looked strange and awful. His lower limbs was encased in the railway rug, fastened so as to form a long petticoat. Iveson's coat clothed him above, and the staring red and green kerchief, which had adorned Pedley's throat, now did duty on that of the refined gentleman. Iveson had reached the spot just as the combatants were drawn out of the water, and had taken such steps towards their restoration as his good sense and presence of mind dictated ; he and his squire

had contributed their efforts to clothe him after removing his wet things, and Smith and Gray had done the same for Jif Coates.

Iveson is kneeling beside the prostrate soldier.

“If you can trust me to lift you, colonel, I will carry you so gently, you will hardly feel the motion. We must get you out of this cold dark place.”

“Ah! do not move me,” groaned the sufferer, “let me die here. The agony when you touch me is insupportable.”

Alice struggled to her feet. Those tones of distress had lent new vigour to her exhausted frame. She came now, and holding Iveson's arm with both hands she said,

“We must give him chloroform and then we can move him. It did not do him the least harm the last time, and you know Dr. Samson said he did not run any risk in taking it.”

"Where can any be got?" he asked.

"There is some in a cupboard in my room. It is in a blue bottle, and ticketed in large letters. And we must have a mattress to carry him on."

"I will go at once. But your brother's state is also precarious, I must have him seen to. Here, Pedley, help Mr. George along; and you had better bring Jif, too, we'll take them out in the waggon."

Obedient to the command of the master mind, the men proceeded to leave the corridor, and Alice shuddered to find herself left alone again, but it was not for long. Ere the noise of the waggon rolling along the main level had died away, two women appeared from the chamber. One of them drew near to Alice, and, pouring something into a cup, she said,

"I'm Mike Pedley's wife, honey, and young

Iveson sent me here to bid you sup this. He telled me to put t'brandy up to t'flowers, and then fill t'cup wi' watter, and he said you was to sup it, wi' his respects."

Alice drank the potion that the good woman put to her lips. She then ventured to give some to her father, for his groans, though not less frequent, were becoming so low that she feared he was growing faint.

"His head lies awkward," said Mrs. Pedley, and, sitting down on the cold stones, she lifted the colonel's head into her lap. He groaned at the movement, but it evidently added to his comfort.

"Sit down, Jenny Mecca," said the good woman to her friend, "and let miss lean upon you, and lap your shawl about her. There, that's more likely; now shut yer eyes, honey, and try to get a bit o' sleep. Ye've wrought terrible hard this last four and twenty hours,

and there's hard work afore ye. Get a bit o' rest while ye can, for t'sake o' them as sets such store by ye."

Alice closed her eyes. The brandy she had taken was a more potent dose than she had ever had before. Like a weary child she nestled to the honest body whose powerful arms were round her, and she fell into a deep sleep, not waking till Richard's voice sounded in her ear; then she started up, and was all alertness for the duties of the hour. She administered the chloroform, and the men lifted her father on to the mattress, she herself taking charge of the poor tortured limb. He made the same low moaning that he had done on the former occasion, and as Alice moved the limb he looked full at her, exclaiming, "You cruel wretch, can't you let me alone!" She knew that he was insensible, but still it was a terrible task. Iveson, Pedley,

and two other men carried the mattress, which they had spread on a gate. Alice walked beside the wounded arm, renewing the application of chloroform from time to time, and steadying the litter when the road was rougher than usual.

Oh, what a relief it was to emerge into the warm summer night, and see the clear sky and the golden glow in the west, where the sun had recently set! Iveson had a pony ready for Alice, but she refused to mount it; she was not tired, she assured him, and she preferred walking all the way across the moor, that she might attend to her father.

They carried him straight to his room and lifted him upon the couch. Iveson and the doctor removed his clothes, and when consciousness returned he found himself snugly in bed, with his kind friend beside him, ready to assure him of the well-being of his son

and daughter, who were at his entreaty now taking the rest they so sorely needed. He did not add that Pedley was riding down to Swaleford, at the best speed of the agent's good horse, to telegraph for Dr. Samson.

CHAPTER V.

LOST !

Was it her fancy when she thought
The fitful breeze wild echoes brought
Of boisterous wassailing ? Those strains
Were mingled with the wailful moan
Of captives toiling in their chains ;
And Phenma heard these words alone,
Like the low continuous dirge
Chanted by a far-off surge !
Upon some rocky shoal wind-tost
For ever, and for ever lost !

Phenma.

By the first train in the morning Mr. Aylmer travelled to Weston. There he made his way to the humble street in which according to the address given by Mahala, her aunt lived.

But he inquired of the neighbours in vain.

Presently he saw a little shop, and dived into it; the shopwoman thought he was a customer, and hurried forward to serve him.

“Can you have the kindness to direct me to the abode of Sarah Hamlyn? Her maiden name was Long, and she came from my parish. She was in service here, and here became acquainted with the fisherman Hamlyn, who is now her husband.”

“I know the woman, sir, but her have left here only a fortnight since. Her be gone to live on the cottage on the sea-wall, this side the Pylle; it be nearer to Clevedon than to Weston.”

“Can you direct me thither?”

“Well, sir, the road is not good to find. You must go up the south road, and round the end of the hill, and then along the beach road. You will come to two villages, and

you must pass through both, and keep on by the sea. There is a river runs in, and you'll have to turn up the country a bit, as if you was going to Kingston; but when you see a bridge, cross it, and then turn seawards again. The path on the other side of the river will lead you straight to the sea-wall, sir; and if you walk along it, you can't mistake the fisherman's house, for it stands partly against the sea wall, and partly upon it. It is the only house there. There's some houses at the Pylle, but that is half a mile further on."

Mr. Aylmer thanked the good woman gratefully, and braced himself to his task. He left Weston by the route she had prescribed, traversing the margin of the stretch of mud left by the receding tide. Having passed through the two villages, and left several miles behind him, he came to the bridge in question. Nothing could exceed the desola-

tion of the scene, as he gazed down upon it from the slight elevation afforded by the arch. From Weston hill to Clevedon the country was a dead flat, cut into squares of water meadows by intersecting ditches. The elevation was higher in the Weston direction, but only so much so as to protect the land from the tide ; but for a mile and a half from this bridge it was only at tide level, and a strong body of masonry, four feet in breadth, was raised the whole length of the flat, to protect the meadows from the ravages of the high tides. Now it seemed incredible that the sea could ever approach near enough to do any damage, for it was low water, and acres of mud, greened over with thrift and sea-lavender, and saltwort, lay beneath the sea-wall ; this was broken into pools and hollows at a little distance, then lost its green covering altogether, but kept its consistency ; and

then acres and acres—I had almost said miles—of wet mud shining in the sunlight, wearied the eye with the glittering sameness; while the narrow strip of water visible from the low shore, seemed at least two miles off, and was unworthy the name of sea.

Oppressed with the dreariness of the scene, and eager to rescue the impressible Mercy from its influences, the good rector hurried along the path, and found steps in the wall which descended into the little cottage garden. He knocked at the door, and it was opened by a tidy woman, who recognised him at once, and dusting a chair with her apron, begged him to rest.

“Have you received my letter, Mrs. Hamlyn?” he asked.

“No, sir, I have not. Hamlyn haven’t went to Weston all this week, for he do sell his fish in Clevedon now.”

“And Mahala and Mercy, are they not here?”

The woman turned pale.

“Oh! sir, you haven’t dismissed the maids!”

“Alas! Mrs. Hamlyn, Mahala has conducted herself so ill, that I have been compelled to dismiss her at a moment’s warning. She has defrauded me of large sums of money, and the worst of it is, she swears she is in extreme poverty, and will not give the smallest hint of what she has done with the money. She has made away with seventy pounds, and has nothing to show for it!”

The aunt rocked herself backwards and forwards in her chair, weeping bitterly.

“Ah!” she cried, “if my sister do hear this in Australy it will break her heart! It’s all them Breads, they be a bad lot, and it were the worst thing as ever came to sister

when her did marry Broad. There was never a Long with a crakter for thieving—oh dear ! oh dear ! I shall never hold up my head again !”

She continued to weep distractedly, then she looked up again.

“And did you consider, please, sir, that Mercy had been misled by Mahla ?”

“No, no, I do not think so indeed. Both Mrs. Aylmer and I have a high opinion of Mercy. But she ran away last night, and I can find no trace of her. In my heart I believe that it is the shame of Mahala’s crimes that has driven her to this foolish step, and I felt certain that I should find her with you ; I don’t know of any one else that she could go to.”

“No, sir, her haven’t got no other relations on her mother’s side, and the Broads are such a low lot that her would not be likely to go

to them. Her's as lovesome a maid as I have ever seen, and I would do as much for her as for my own maid, as is just going out to place for the first time. If you please, sir, I would like that her shouldn't know what Mahla's been up to; it would that shame her, sir, that her would have no heart to go to place."

"I think you are quite right. But what can have become of these girls? I paid Mahala's expenses to Weston only three days ago; it was the very day after her parents sailed."

"Well, sir, I did wonder at Mahla when I did see she at Bristol, her did look so shabby. And I did say as much to sister, and her said her could not understand Mahla either. Her said that Mercy did give her some clothes, though her had but got one half year's wages, but that Mahla did say her was so poor her

had nothing to give. And her getting ten pounds a year, and such cast clothes as might serve two maids !”

“Then do I understand that Mahala never appeared here since she came for one night a month or two ago ?”

“Sir, I haven’t seen Mahla, except for five minutes at Bristol, when my sister and her family were leaving, not sin three years ago, when I did come to Chalkley for Whitsuntide.”

Mr. Aylmer lifted up his hands in amazement.

“That girl is thoroughly false !” he exclaimed. “She asked for a holiday on purpose to come to you. She was absent from Saturday to Monday night. If she did not come to you, I wonder where she went ?”

“Nay, sir, I be fair mazed. Her must have some good-for-nothing sweetheart, who has put her up to such things.”

“No, Mrs. Hamlyn, there you wrong her. The one good point in her character is, that she is thoroughly steady. A man was never seen about the house all the time that Mahala was there. You will perhaps say she was too plain to attract them.”

“No, sir, I wouldn't say that. Plain faces don't make maids steady. I have heard folks say that the men run after the pretty maids, and the ugly maids run after the men. At any rate, I do believe the ugly ones is the worst.”

“Then the more credit is due to Mahala in this respect. But I cannot even form a conjecture where she went. If I could find out where she went, then I should hope to find her there now, and Mercy with her.”

“Oh, sir, my heart is broke for Mercy. Her be that kind of innocent, lovesome maid

her will believe whatever anyone do say to she. Oh, I fear, I fear her will come to harm ! Please, sir, can you stop till Hamlyn comes, for maybe he will be able to think of something."

But when Hamlyn came he could no more suggest anything than the master or aunt could do. Each promised to use every effort to gain a trace of Mercy ; each promised her pardon and shelter, if ever, and whenever she should return.

" And you'll not shut the door against her if her should come back in trouble, Hamlyn ?" said his wife. " Many maids go wrong from lightness, but Mercy, her may go wrong from nothing but innocence, and believing of people ; and if her should come back in trouble, and I should be gone to Weston or anywhere, thee must promise never to turn she from the door."

And, in the presence of the rector, Hamlyn did promise, and never forgot that he had done so.

CHAPTER VI.

MAHALA BEGINS TO REAP THE WHIRLWIND.

All things hang upon comparison ; to the greater great is
small :

Neither is there anything so vile, but somewhat yet is
viler.

MARTIN TUPPER.

THEN, where did Mahala go, if she never
reached Weston ? We shall see.

When the passengers changed carriages at
Bristol, Mahala left the station. She walked
rapidly along the streets till she reached the
house where her lover lodged. But she in-
quired for him in vain. With some difficulty

she found out his shop, but he was not there, at least not when she entered ; she had seen a figure glide out by a back entrance, but that of course could not be he.

A dark glow suffused her cheek, and angry glances shot from her eyes, as she stood in the street, uncertain where to go next. She was very weary, and was now suffering from the reaction of her nerves after the stimulants she had taken so freely of late, but she must go somewhere, that was certain.

She could do nothing till she had seen Crompton ; so she returned to the street in which he lodged, and entering a small shop, asked leave to sit down a little while.

At last the garish light of day faded, and she felt sufficiently rested to be equal to more walking ; but just as she was leaving the shop she saw her lover go into a public-house opposite. Now she had her cue, so she turned

to the shop-woman, and asked her if she would give her a cup of tea, adding that she wished to pay for it all the same as if she ordered it at a public-house, only that wasn't a right place for a respectable servant to go to. The woman gave her the tea, and she further bargained with her for a night's lodging. She watched till Crompton emerged from the public-house, and then, following with rapid step, she caught his arm, and said,

“I have lost all for your sake, what will you do for me?”

He shook her off.

“Do for you!—nothing!” he exclaimed, angrily. “Father have written me word of your doings; and I am quite ashamed to have ever been spoke of as looking after you. I have nothing more to say to you, and I do beg you'll not be a-coming after me!”

He was passing on, but she seized his arm.

“William Crompton,” she said, “you shall hear me! What I am you’ve made me! You know why I’ve stole. You would not marry me till I did bring one hundred pounds—here it is!”

She pulled an old stocking from her pocket and jingled the money.

He started, and his manner altered.

“You did make too much haste, Mahla. You had ought to have waited, and saved by little and little, as honest maids do—then—”

But the woman interrupted him.

“Honest maids, indeed! There it was. If you had left me an honest maid, I could have waited; but I knowed that disgrace of one kind or another must come, so I made haste. Once I did make up my mind to be

different and to go on quietly, get a holiday, and tell my mother all; but her has went away, and folks did tell I that you was courting another woman that was rich, so I did sell my best clothes to make up the sum, and I be come with the money in my hand to claim your word. You had best marry me, Crompton. I'll make you a real hardworking wife, and I'm not a safe enemy to have."

Her usually harsh voice assumed a wondrous gentleness as she spoke the last sentence.

He laughed scornfully.

"I should be ashamed to shew you as my wife; not only are you a thief and a —, but as ugly as sin. Take your money and go about your business. If you do bother me any more I'll call a policeman, and tell him you have stolen money upon you."

Her eyes glared dangerously, her colour was livid, but she controlled herself yet a while.

“A hundred pounds is a deal o’ money, it has taken a deal o’ getting together”—she shuddered as she spoke—“you won’t get a hundred down so easy.”

“A hundred! Miss Scraggs, who I am now paying addresses to, has three hundred!”

“Then you refuse?”

“I do.”

She fell on her knees.

“Oh! God in heaven!” she cried, “hear his false oath, and pay him with thy curse! May his evil deeds follow him and blight him at every step in life, and may he die a violent and cruel death!”

Her eyes were fixed as if penetrating the darkness, and he stood paralysed with horror.

“I see it!” she continued—“it is a maddened beast ; there is snow upon the ground, and as he falls to the earth, tossed by the sharp horns, the beast does lift him again, and the snow is red with his blood ! No one can help ; and in the distance I see it, and many another wronged by him sees it !”

The half tipsy and wholly cruel man trembled ; he covered his eyes with his hand, and said in broken accents,

“Take off your curse, Mahla, and we’ll see what can be done.”

No answer was returned, and when he looked for her she had vanished.

He followed down the street, and perceiving a dim form in the distance, hastened after it, bent on obtaining a removal of the curse. At last he overtook the receding figure, but it was not Mahala ; he did not

see her again until—but we must not anticipate.

Mahala took counsel with the woman at whose house she passed the night. It was her sudden entrance within this house which had so entirely eluded Crompton's search. She was not a good woman, yet not bad enough to have killed her womanhood; and as she listened to such part of Mahala's story as she thought fit to unfold, she was penetrated by sincere pity, and she did her best to help her.

She had lived in London, and she portrayed, in livid colours, the privileges of finished cooks, in London families; advising her new friend, "as she had a few pounds to start with," to take lessons at Gunter's in pastry, jellies, and icing, and then to enter herself at a certain register office which she wot of.

“But the crackter,” said Mahala; “master and missis be so fierce against I, they will prevent any one hiring I!”

“Bless you!” replied the hostess, in lofty pity for the ignorance of a country girl—“the London gentry reckon nothing o’ character. If you can cook and please their stomachs, you may be sure of high wages and good perkisits. And you must enter a servant’s club, and that ’ll insure you lots o’ fun. Why, my dear, you don’t half know what a jolly life is till you have been a London servant!”

With the address of a London lodging-house in her pocket, decent enough for Mahala’s purpose, and not virtuous enough to despise her, she started for her new sphere, took lessons as she had intended, and looked out afresh for service.

She found that her Bristol friend was right

in her estimate of London employers. A commanding officer sought a cook for his establishment at Knightsbridge, and liked the description that the man at the office gave of Mahala. As a matter of form, he asked for her character from her last place, and the man replied that "Mrs. Broad declined applying for one."

The general shrugged his shoulders.

"No servant who leaves my house has ever any character to take with her," he said; "and upon my life I think it's more right to bring women so near the barracks who haven't got a character to lose. I'll take the young woman, and give her twenty pounds the first year, and more afterwards if she chooses to stay."

So "Mrs. Broad" found herself located at Knightsbridge, and resolved to stay six months, replenish her wardrobe by means of

perquisites, and save her ten pounds of wages for a possible time of need.

Mahala's was a perverted nature, and it was steadily tending downward, yet so far it was not heartless altogether. Crompton's desertion had given it a tremendous impetus in that direction, but the habit of thought for others was not quite killed. Thus, among her everlasting cookings and concoctings at Knightsbridge, many a thought wandered to the quiet loving home of the past, and the memory of her kind mistress, distressed by her misconduct and scared by her violence, came again and again to her mind.

It was Mahala's Sunday in; and the stately family whom she served had gone to pay the King of kings the graceful compliment of a visit to His courts. The dirty and characterless cook had time on her hands, and this she employed in inditing an epistle, which ran thus:

“HONOURED MADAM,

“You do think I a wicked girl. This do come to tell you that I be more wronged than wicked. One who I shall not name has went and promised ever so to marry me, and I did believe him was as good as his word. So I did everythink to please he, till I did find I had lost my crakter, and then I did get desprate, and did drink, only not disgracing you by sending to the public, but I did take what was in the house, which I hadn't ought to have done but for the state of my mind. Him as I speak of refused to keep his word, and threw me on the cruel world in my trouble, but I be doing very well. I have a good place, twenty pounds wages, dripping, bones, &c., and I mean to stop in it as long as I can. I do not bear you no malice. I often do think of you, and hope you be better. I shall never like another

missis as well, and now that you find how it was that I went wrong, I don't mind if I come back to you about next Midsummer; although I get higher wages here than you give. I send my respects to Mr. Herbert and the young ladies when you do write, and my duty to the master.

“Your humble and obedient Servant,

“MAHALA BROAD.”

She enclosed an address to the lodgings in the east where she had first stayed, and waited the result, confident that her advances would be warmly met, and feeling great self-respect for her disinterestedness in offering to go back to her low wages.

On the Sunday following she went to the house in question, and found a letter from her master. He did not see the matter at all in the same light as she did, and expounded to

her very faithfully that the one error, which she regarded as vast charity "covering a multitude of sins," was only one link in the chain of wrong-doing for which she needed humble and thorough repentance. He gravely assured her that he could not take so stained a character into his household, but offered to gain her admittance to a Magdalen institution, where she would be cared for, and her reformation assisted. He finally exhorted her to two things—to confess what she had done with those large sums of money, and to reveal the whereabouts of her sister Mercy.

Mahala was indignant, but her engagements were too pressing to give her time to write, except on her "Sunday in," and as this occurred only once a month, her indignation had time to cool. But her tone was less kindly, though not more penitent, when she did write. She insisted she "had not been worse

than other girls," that she had "spent the money on the house as she had always said," and that "she knew nothing at all about Mercy, but that it was likely Mr. Herbert did, for she had always believed he was too fond of her, and many young gentlemen kept girls in London."

To this letter came a reply in strong tones of indignation. Mr. Aylmer begged to point out that "one woman's sin was no justification of another's;" he reminded her that "confession was necessary to true repentance," and assured her that he should "never believe her amendment as long as she persevered in the lie that she had spent the money on the house;" lastly, he reproved her sharply for the slur cast on his son, assuring her that he lived an upright and religious life, and had been more concerned and disappointed than anyone else by the undutiful manner of Mercy's disappear-

ance. In conclusion, he hinted that there were such things as prosecutions for libel, and that if Mahala Broad ventured to bespatter the fair name of Mr. Herbert Aylmer with any more dirt, she might find herself obliged to make good her words in a law-court.

Mahala ground her teeth and stamped her foot when she read this.

"You be just like the Pharisees of old, that's what you be. I do hate you all, and I do believe Mr. Herbert be at the bottom of Mercy running away. You wait a bit, my fine gentleman, my hands be full at present, but I'll give an eye to you all in good time, and you shall see Mahala Broad once oftener than you care to!"

She was trudging along by St. Paul's, for she had an appointment at Blackfriars Bridge. The organ was pealing forth its richest notes, and as these sank to a low tone, a choir of

well-trained voices sang—"Behold, behold, thy King cometh!" Mahala paused, and recognised the words.

"Lord ha' mercy," she said, "it's Advent Sunday, and I should have made my mince-meat the Monday aiter 'Stir up.' But it's no matter, I'll do it to-morrow."

She listened to the anthem for a while; the voices reminded her of Mr. Herbert, and she shook her fist at the noble edifice for that memory's sake. Had she gone within, she might have recognised the object of her suspicion in a white surplice, his flute-like voice the admiration of all who attended the eastern cathedral.

But had she recognised him then it would have materially altered the train of events, and it boots not to say how or why. As it was, Herbert sang on, enchanting all hearts, and Mahala walked heavily forward to Black-

friars Bridge, and was soon sailing down the river towards Richmond, with a party of friends who were "out for the day."

CHAPTER VII.

VICTORY AND DEATH.

'Tears are not now thy due. From the world's toil
 Gone to assume in heaven the brighter birth ;
 A winged angel, from thy mortal coil
 Escaped, thy glory lingers yet round earth !
 Christ's hallowed warrior, living, thou went'st forth,
 Christ's champion didst thou die, and now, blest shade,
 The crown and palm of righteousness and worth
 Thou wearest, with joys unspeakable repaid,
 Feeding thine eyes on things to fancy unportrayed.

WIFFEN'S Translation of *Gerusalemme Liberata*.

DR. SAMSON is again by the bedside of Colonel
 Hilary ; but on this occasion no sparkling
 light beams from his eyes, and he forgets to
 shake back the vagrant locks which droop over

his eyes while he bends to examine the aggravated wound.

When he did speak it was to Alice, and seemed to bear no reference to her father's arm.

"Have you any near relations, Miss Hilary?"

"None but my brother."

"Yes, yes," interrupted the invalid. "There is Gertrude, a niece of mine, a married woman in a good position. Telegraph for her and her husband—isn't that what you mean, doctor?"

"It is."

"But why?" asked Alice; and her terrified look showed that she anticipated the reply.

Her father gave it.

"Dr. Samson sees what I have all along felt and told you of, that I am a dying man;

and he knows some one ought to be here to take charge of you."

Alice turned eagerly to the doctor, as if to entreat him to contradict this statement ; but instead of that he corroborated it with a grave inclination of his head. Alice glided from the room to seek George, but instead of him she met Iveson pacing the hall.

"What does the doctor say ?" he asked eagerly, his pale compressed lips revealing his intense anxiety.

Alice looked despairingly in his face, and he read the look. She passed him, and entered the dining-room. He followed her.

"Can I not write for you ?" he asked, as she took pen and paper, and her trembling hand refused to form the characters.

She put the pen into his hands, and said,

"Francis Gerald, Esq., Fair Oaks, Old

Windsor, Berkshire.—Come and bring your wife, Colonel Hilary is——”

She laid her head on the table, and abundant tears came to her relief. Iveson filled in the words “in great danger.”

“Shall I take this to Swaleford?” he said.

“Don’t go, but send. I want you. Oh! Mr. Iveson, you have been so kind—you have taught me to cling to you! Don’t leave me now!”

Her air of entreaty, the look of desolation, which seemed to say, “Take me to your heart,” the unmistakeable warmth of her words, conspired to make Richard Iveson’s brain reel, and the impulse to draw her to his breast was almost too strong for control, had not the door burst open and George entered suddenly. He seized the telegraphic message, and read; then kneeling by Alice, and encircling her in his arms, he said :

“My poor darling, this is a terrible blow for you.”

Alice clung weeping to George, and Iveson, seeing that she had found a comforter, mounted his horse, and rode to Swaleford, not returning till he received the return message, promising that Mr. and Mrs. Gerald would travel by the night mail.

Strange days and nights followed, each of which seemed unlike its fellows, and still more unlike all that had gone before, or could succeed it. Alice seldom left her father's room, but, assisted by George, and sometimes by Iveson, she anticipated his every desire, or watched beside him when he slept heavily under the effect of frequently administered opiate. Twice in the day the soporific was given, but its effect became continually less lasting, and the invalid would not allow a greater frequency. He suffered terribly, and

as Alice saw the agony increasing, she could no longer pray for the continuance of his life.

Mrs. Gerald lounged about ; she was “ very sorry for the poor colonel’s suffering,” “ very sorry for that poor melancholy girl,” but she “ wished that it was not necessary for Edward and herself to eat dinners of Barbara’s preparing, and remain buried in that awfully dull place.”

Her endurance was not so very long tried. The colonel slept under the opiate, and as Alice sat beside him in the silence of the night, she heard drops falling on the floor. At first she thought little of it, but drop, drop, drop, at regular intervals, at last attracted her attention. A cradle was placed over the suffering arm, and the sheet covered that ; her father’s face was more peaceful than it had been for long, and he breathed

quietly without groaning. Alice took the lamp, and looked under the bed to discover the cause of the dropping, and lo ! a pool of blood had already gathered. This was the beginning of the end. Alice glanced at her watch ; it was four o'clock, and that was Iveson's time for relieving the watch ; he came immediately, and she showed him the new horror. He called in the doctor, and the colonel awoke to find them all about him. He smiled sweetly, said he was quite easy now, and bade them leave him for a few minutes with Mr. Gerald.

“ You will tell George not to be hurt that I have left all to Alice ; it is but little that I have to leave. You and Iveson are the executors, but I have gained a promise from him that he will do all the business, as I know your hands are too full already. He wishes to have unquestioned powers for a year, and guarantees to pay Alice one hundred pounds for her

board, and fifty pound for private expenses the first year, and perhaps more afterwards. You can keep Alice for one hundred pounds?"

"Certainly we can. Alice shall be at home with us if she can get on with our girls; Annette and the young ones do very well together, so I see no reason why Alice should not be equally comfortable."

"Then that is settled. I am much relieved. Where is Iveson?"

Mr. Gerald hastened to bring him. As soon as they were alone together, the colonel took his hand.

"My friend," he said, "you have been as a dear and faithful son to me, as a wise brother to my poor child. May God bless you for the tenderness you have shewn us both! I do not doubt poor George, yet I trust rather to you than to him to be a guardian to Elsie. Watch over her, Iveson, and

if ever she questions your right to counsel, tell her you are authorized by me. I say this to you privately, in the fear of wounding my poor boy. Now let my children come to me."

They remained by his side generally silent, and listening to the drip, drip of the oozing life.

"Alice," he whispered, "you know what my sufferings have been. You are not reluctant to let me go to rest?"

"No, no, papa. I shall thank God when you are safely in His kingdom."

"George, I trust your sister's happiness to you. Your good conduct, and that alone can ensure it. It has not been God's will that I should live to see your new resolutions tested, but I trust them fully."

"Father, your trust is far more than I deserve, but you shall see that it is not

misplaced when you look down from above."

They were kneeling by him, he drew their heads together, and placed his one hand on the two. He spoke no more.

It was well for Alice that much responsibility still rested with her. To her alone had her father spoken of his wishes regarding his funeral; and greatly as Mr. Gerald opposed the idea, she and George insisted on his being laid in the quiet burying-ground in Botcherdale. Mrs. Gerald lifted her hands in horror when it was first mooted, and pleaded eagerly that he should be conveyed to the family vault on the estates of his ancestors; but his own wish to be laid peaceably to rest, without fuss or unnecessary cost, was final with his children; and so the matter was settled decisively.

A greater crowd even than that which assembled on Shooter's Sunday came together

in and about the church on the 2nd of September, when the colonel was carried to his last home. All the enthusiasm of Botcherdale was called forth by the conduct of Alice regarding her brother; and George's adventures and exertions were more attractive to the miners than those of Jack the Giant-killer. As for the colonel, they forgave him the pride which at first they had so bitterly resented, and pronounced him, by general consent, "a tidy old chap."

The reading of the will was a mere form, for all knew its contents before, and Alice had devoted, and was devoting all her energy to preparing an outfit for her brother, putting his clothes into good repair, or procuring new linen before he entered on his new career with Dr. Samson.

This necessitated her stay at the Hall for a few days, so Mr. and Mrs. Gerald took their

leave, and Richard Iveson promised to escort Miss Hilary to Windsor whenever George should take his departure for the northern capital.

Mrs. Gerald was extremely polite to our friend Richard, and pressed him to spend a little time at Fair Oaks when he was over there ; and her husband marvelled thereat, for he could not account for her conduct on her usual plan of tactics.

“ Gertrude,” he said, when they were seated in the railway carriage, “ what on earth were you making such a fuss with Iveson for ? You cannot think him a desirable *parti* for Ella or Lina, and you only cultivate such in general.”

“ I am turning over a new leaf, Edward,” she replied ; “ I must clear away some pawns before I can bring my best pieces into play. Mr. Iveson may suit Annette if he has not

won Alice already, and it looks better to have men coming and going."

Her husband gave a long whistle.

"Just imagine what the old race of Hilarys would think of your cool plan! Why, when I admired Elsie's aunt I dared not breathe it; sure that the 'man of business' would be snubbed for lifting his thoughts to one of 'the family.' I had even some doubts about approaching Mrs. Hilary's niece, and was much overcome by her condescension in accepting me!"

"So you ought to have been. If I could only cut Mr. Iveson in two, I would marry one half to Alice and the other to Annette. As he is indivisible, they must toss up for him. I cannot and will not go out with a tail of four marriageable girls. Alice must keep quiet this winter, and if she does not marry before next, she and Annette must take turn

about. I am sure I am very good to endure three at a time, when I never could bear girls."

The "girls" in question reciprocated their mother's feeling in so far that they gave her as little of their society as it was possible to do. But they gathered round her on her return from Botcherdale, begging for particulars of their cousin, asking what kind of girl she was, and whose friend she would be.

"I really don't know," was the wearied reply. "She is very ladylike, or I should not have consented to her coming here; Annette is quite enough for me in the awkward squad. She is, I daresay, like other girls—very troublesome and unmanageable, always wanting what she has not got, and despising what she has. You will see her in a week, and you must wait for further information until then. Pray, Ella, have you finished that drawing of the church?"

“No, mamma ; it is nearly done, but not quite. My time has been taken up in practising for last night’s concert. It was such a success !”

“I don’t believe a word of it. I daresay you sung horridly, and disgraced yourself ! And Sir Henry Armstrong is coming to-morrow, mad about Church restoration, and your sketch is not fit to show him ! You certainly are the most trying girl I ever had to deal with ! What have you done, Lina ? Practised, surely ?”

“Sometimes. You know I hate music.”

“Of course you do. You odious girls hate everything that can be of use to you. As if you had any chance of being attractive without music !”

She looked quite despairing. Ella was gliding away, but she paused when Lina said,

“Annette has practised and drawn enough for both of us.”

“Annette is a goose!—a heavy stupid goose!” retorted Mrs. Gerald angrily. “She has no ear, a voice like a guinea-fowl, and hands as big as window-shutters. I trust in heaven she did not sing at the concert?”

Lina looked mischievous ; but her reply was checked by the entrance of Annette, flushed and very warm. She bustled up to Mrs. Gerald, and said,

“I have made such haste to be home in time, dear mamma, but the vicar detained me about the church-singing. I am so glad to see you safely at home again. And how did you leave poor, dear, interesting Alice?”

“Do stand off, Annette. Yon are like a huge loaf, fresh taken from the oven—your steam scorches me. What is this I hear about you singing at the concert?”

“ Oh ! it didn't signify. I broke down ; but the vicar says he does not think that many persons observed it. He says he believes I shall manage very well, if I only practise more ; and I am going to sing two hours a day, and to play two hours.”

“ Heaven defend us ! I will have your piano put into the Lodge. Mrs. Gosling will be able to spare her parlour for the torture. And in what other way have you been making yourself notorious.”

“ Oh ! I have not been up to anything. I've been sketching, to be sure, and Mr. Robinson likes my interior vastly.”

“ I wish he'd like your exterior.”

“ Now, don't, mamma. He is too High Church for me. I could never marry one who believed in baptismal regeneration. Shall I fetch you my sketch ?”

“ Oh, dear no ! I can see it in my mind's

eye. The pulpit looks as if it was walking up the church ; the font stands higher than it does, and the lectern is the biggest of all. Everything is out of proportion, and the most carefully painted object is the sermon-case, which you would persuade the beholder the preacher has left behind him."

"Lina has been telling you."

"No, she hasn't. I can read you without a dictionary. Don't come near me—you are not half cool. And don't ask endless questions about Alice Hilary ; for you will have to wait a week for the answers."

CHAPTER VIII.

PARTINGS.

Honest simplicity and truth were all
The agents I employed ; and when I came
To see you it was with that reverence
As I beheld the altars of the gods :
And love, that came along with me, was taught
To leave his arrows and his torch behind,
Quench'd in my fear to give offence.

MASSINGER.

THE sun has risen gloriously, and as Alice Hilary collects the last remaining of her few treasures, and glances round her to see that nothing is left behind, the sunshine falls on the familiar objects in her room, and throws

a vivid picture of hill and dale upon the small mirror hanging opposite the window.

“ Oh, beautiful Botcherdale !” exclaimed the sorrowing girl, “ I would that your face had looked a little sad on the morning of my parting with you !”

A knock at the door drew away her attention from the external scene. It was George, come to know if her packages were ready, for Iveson wanted to place them in the dog-cart before he brought it round.

“ Dear George !” she said, leaning her head on his shoulder, “ is it not hard to have to leave Botcherdale !”

“ Not to me, Elsie. I am thankful for the Providence that sent me here—it has changed the purpose of my life. But it has been a time of terrible suffering ; and though I never can forget Botcherdale, I never wish to see it again.”

“I, too, have suffered here. But I have had so much happiness as well! You know mine has been a lonely life, George; and since I came here I have been more cared for than ever before. I feel as if I had been years instead of eight short months.”

George examined his sister's face carefully.

“You can come back to Botcherdale some day if you like, Elsie.”

“I know I can. But that will be different. The dear old days can never return.”

George looked perplexed, but could not wait to question his sister further; and so he bore off her box and carpet-bag, and bade her hasten to prepare herself for the journey.

When they had fairly started, Elsie had no longer reason to complain of the unsympathetic brilliancy of the morning. Clouds like smoke rose from the mountain tops, and gra-

dually descended the ravines, covering all within their level with mist, and creeping lower and lower, until, just as they reached the broader part of the valley, every object was ingulphed in the fog; and ere she reached the station, her veil was heavy with moisture, while the hair and whiskers of her companion were bedizened with crystal drops.

The bell rang, the whistle sounded, away steamed train after train, one bearing the brother northward to a new and hopeful life, the other carrying the sister to a strange and dreaded home, under the shadow of royalty.

Elsie pretended to read, that her companion might not think her sad; but, though he never seemed to be watching her, he was fully aware that she never turned a page of her book, and that, when she feigned to sleep, tears escaped through her closed eyelids.

He rightly interpreted her meaning in concealing her grief, and forbore to show how he had penetrated her secret. But when some fellow-travellers left the carriage, and they found themselves alone, he began to converse.

“I wish you would describe your cousins to me, Miss Hilary. It is an unwonted trial for me to have to face three strange young ladies ; you should prepare me for the ordeal.”

“I have not seen them for years, so my description will be too indefinite to serve your purpose. Ella is now eighteen, and Lina seventeen. When last I saw them, they were lovely children, in white muslin dresses and blue ribbons, and their hair dressed in a very picturesque style. I felt awkward and uninteresting by them, for I had just attained my growth, and my newly-acquired length of limb

was strange and embarrassing to me, so I envied their grace and beauty."

Richard smiled a very meaning smile as his eyes rested fondly on the beautiful face beside him, pale now, but resembling alabaster in its chiselled purity, and the nut-brown hair with its golden lights. But the long lashes did not rise, nor the coral lips move; and when he had formed another question, his countenance was again schooled into its business-like expression.

"But there is a third young lady, older than these, is there not?"

"Oh! yes, but I have not seen her. She is the daughter of Mr. Gerald, not of cousin Gertrude. Papa had a horror of her, for she asked him to act in a charade when he met her at the house of a mutual friend in London; she wanted him to personate Rob Roy, and on his dignified refusal, she declared

she would take the part herself. Papa could not bear her very name."

"I daresay she has learned better now. Mrs. Gerald will have trained her into conventionalities long ere this."

"I daresay she will. I inherit papa's shrinking, and hope to see very little of her."

"Then you intend to make companions of your younger cousins?"

"Not of Ella and Lina! They were flirts, as children—very pretty and attractive, but so fond of display. There are younger ones who may amuse me, but I expect to be far more lonely than I was at Thorny Hall. Oh! that you could come in and out, as there, then it would be different—the music of your voice, and the sunshine of your kindness, would make it a different world to me!"

She raised her eyes, this time all suffused

with tears ; they were clearer and deeper than ever, like richly-coloured Cairngorms glistening with mountain dew. He took her hand, and his arm stole round her as he whispered,

“I will often come to see you; your absence will make a far greater blank in my life than mine can in yours.”

The tears would not stay, and, ashamed that he should see them fall, she leaned her forehead on his shoulder, as she sought her handkerchief to wipe them away. A shrill whistle startled her, and ere she could regain composure the train was entering the King's Cross Station.

Iveson gathered together the packages, called a cab, and bid the driver hasten to Paddington. The train for Windsor that they found waiting was an express one, and each carriage filled quickly with accustomed pas-

sengers. At the Windsor Station they found Mr. Gerald's carriage waiting for them, and for him, as he had, unknown to them, travelled by the same train.

Mr. Gerald welcomed Elsie kindly, and her companion courteously, and the short drive was occupied by his pointing out fine views of the park or castle, or the country seats of men of note. As they stopped for the gate to be opened at Fair Oaks, they heard the sonorous notes of the Dead March in Saul being badly played on a jingling piano. Mr. Gerald coloured and looked annoyed, and talked louder and faster than was pleasing, to drown the music, and in a few minutes the carriage swept rapidly along a well-kept drive, round a smooth lawn, and paused at the hall door.

Mrs. Gerald advanced to meet Elsie, clad in graceful mourning, and two elegant girls

stole softly to her side. The elder kissed her cousin, and said softly,

“We are very glad you are come to live with us;” but the other kissed her in silence, her observation engrossed by Mr. Iveson.

The two girls were dressed in white, a pattern like Greek sculpture traced on the margin of the skirt and bodice in clear black lines; they had black sashes, and jet chains and bracelets. Mr. Iveson could not have described this costume, but it pleased his eye, and he was still dwelling on the charming group when the hall door was opened violently, and a large woman burst in, rushed up to Elsie, and folded her in an awful embrace.

“Dear orphan!” she cried with a sob; “welcome to Fair Oaks! Lean your bereaved head on my bosom, and do not suppress your tears; they are nature’s sweet relief.”

“Good heavens! Ann, when will you learn

to restrict tragedy to private life. Take Alice to her own room if you are bent on tormenting her, and don't make a fool of her in public."

Miss Gerald released Alice from her embrace, and stood for a moment in uncertainty.

Her figure formed a strange contrast in the group. Mrs. Gerald was certainly stout for her height, but she was dressed in perfect taste, and the folds of her crisp black dress fell in graceful amplitude. Ann, or Annette as she desired to be called, wore an aged garment, the remains of some bygone season of mourning, when much less material was crowded into a lady's dress. The unfashionable form, the rusty hue of the dress, together with the unfortunate figure and untidy coiffure of the young lady, placed her in most inharmonious contrast with her step-mother and step-sisters. Mr. Gerald noticed this, and looked irritated; the girls suppressed a laugh, and Mrs. Gerald's

stern look conveyed even to the insensible Annette that the scene was to be brought to a conclusion. So she bore Alice off to the apartment destined for her use.

At her friend's desire, Alice seated herself, and Annette proceeded to remove her bonnet and mantle, nearly pulling off the strings of the former in her eagerness to untie them. Then she fell heavily on her knees, and, putting one massive arm round Alice, she said, "Religion, darling, religion is your only refuge in this hour of trial, the only solace to the bruised spirit."

"Undoubtedly it is," replied Alice; she longed to add, "But I need solitude to seek its consolations."

"Ah, Alice," continued her enthusiastic friend, "nothing is more soul-destroying than those abstract ideas of religion which so many lean on. In this hour of trial it behoves you

to ascertain if you have true conversion—if your election is sure.”

Alice could not reply. Religion to her was a principle, not a party cry. She could no more endure to speak out her love for her heavenly than for her earthly Father. In many an hour of distress she had thrown herself at the feet of the Incarnate God, and in pouring out her sorrows before Him had felt as evident a soothing as if His hand had been laid on her head, and His bodily voice had spoken the words, “Daughter, go in peace.” But these were joys in which no stranger could intermeddle—these must ever lie between herself and God.

“I am sure you mean kindly, Annette, and I thank you. Will you leave me now to prepare for dinner.”

“I go, darling. But, Alice, don’t put these reflections aside; remember the fate of

him who waited for a 'more convenient season.' Did you hear the music, love?"

"What, at the Lodge?"

"Yes, as you drove in."

"Oh yes, I heard it. Was it the lodge-keeper's daughter who was playing?"

"No, love, it was I. I always associate your soldier father with the Duke of Wellington, and that march was played by all the bands at his funeral."

"It was a kind thought; I thank you for it, Annette."

She steadily applied herself to prepare for dinner, and it suddenly flashed upon Annette that her toilette was yet to make, so, to Alice's great relief, she departed. When she appeared in the drawing-room, just after dinner was announced, she wore a soiled white dress and faded lilac ribbons, and looked more at a disadvantage than ever.

Mrs. Gerald made her sit on the other side of Mr. Iveson. He liked his position because it was opposite to Alice, and he could watch her countenance; but he soon found that Miss Gerald would leave him very little time for his wonted reflections. She drank her soup hastily, and then asked,

“Are you fond of geology, Mr. Iveson?”

“I used to be when I was less busy. But of late I have had no time for practical study.”

“A common complaint. But, Mr. Iveson, a firm will will *make* time. You should make a rule to go out with your hammer once a week at least.”

“But suppose that in doing so I should have to neglect more important business?”

“That need not be the case, if the time were redeemed from sleep.”

Iveson sighed; those early morning hours

had been spent in working for Alice. How he should now miss his motive for gardening! how blank and dull his daily life would seem to him!

Annette ascribed his sigh and his silence to the convicting power of her words, so she added presently, as the ham and chicken disappeared off her plate, "You must not waste energy in vain regrets, but turn all your efforts to profit by the present."

"You are right," he said eagerly; and treated himself to a long gaze at Alice.

"What do you think of flint implements?" asked his neighbour.

"They are curious; but I do not consider their extreme age to be proven."

"Oh! there you are mistaken. It is ascertained that remains of pottery found in the Nile Delta are of incalculable antiquity, and doubtless these flint knives and arrowheads

have belonged to the same race of men."

Iveson smiled.

"The trifling fact of a trade mark ascertained to be Greek upon the pottery fixes its antiquity at a very calculable date, and the circumstance of it having sunk so deep in the mud, suggests its having found its level by its own specific gravity ; at any rate it upsets the plan of calculating the speed of accumulation then, by the laws we see in force now. All geological observations are interesting, and must tend to the attainment of truth, so long as we observe in a humble spirit ; but geological dogmatism tends as certainly to the confusion of truth as religious dogmatism does."

"Really, Mr. Iveson, you have very strange opinions ! To think of your setting up a theory opposed to that of Sir Charles Lyell ! Surely you are presumptuous ?"

"Excuse me, madam. You mistake me

entirely. I set up no opinion, announce no theory. I only record a verdict of 'Not proven' against much speculative geology of the present day. The most logical argument based on mere speculation is worth nothing; and it is with such that our geologists entertain us now. Truth wants a martyr from time to time, and it would be a new era for geology if someone would stand up and object—first, mind you, thoroughly qualifying himself by patient investigations for so doing—and compel men to study nature again divested of all received theories."

"Mr. Iveson, if it is not beneath your attention, will you give me another custard."

He complied with her request, thankful to be left free for a while; and his thoughts flowed back to Alice, fearing lest she should be lonely in this household.

In the evening they played croquet on the

lawn. Mr. Iveson of course made mistakes, and bad hits at first, and Annette patronized him hugely ; but his careful eye and firm hand soon raised him in the scale of croquet-players ; and by the time the darkness fell he was deemed a good ally and a dangerous enemy.

“Walk with me for five minutes,” he whispered to Alice, as the group dispersed. “It will be our last chance of a few quiet words.”

She placed her arm in his, and they entered a shady path leading to the river bank. A weeping-willow dipped its branches in the fast-flowing stream, while it overshadowed a rustic seat. Alice entered the bower, glad to rest there, instead of walking, she was so very tired.

“Dear Miss Hilary,” said Iveson, “you will try to be happy here? I shall be so

miserable if I think you are so. Time passes quickly, and you know this is only a temporary arrangement. Try to make the best of things. Miss Ella has a pleasant countenance. I think you might win her love."

"Perhaps I might, but I have no heart to try. I want to go on loving old friends—it is all I have courage for. You and George are as much as I can think of."

"You will write to me, Miss Hilary?"

"Oh, yes, I must do so! I wish you would call me 'Alice,' and let me feel you to be as much a brother as George is."

A quiver passed through his whole being, and Elsie exclaimed,

"You are cold, let us go in."

"No," he said; and he detained her with a firm hand. "I am not cold, and I cannot spare you yet. Alice, my sister, all these arrangements are but temporary; let us get

over a year, and we will start everything from a new foundation. I have never had a sister before—I may make much of the one I now have found.”

He kissed her brow gently ; as he did so a loud voice said,

“Now, that is what I like. People who never can be more to each other can be so happy loving *en sœur* ! Don’t disturb yourselves—this seat holds three. Is it not a heavenly evening ? So peaceful, so pathetic, so full of suggestive thought ?”

Annette had no idea she was *de trop*. She only wished to draw out both Iveson and Alice, to the intent that she might influence them for good.

Richard Iveson departed betimes on the morrow, having just accepted a pressing invitation from Mrs. Gerald for a longer visit at Christmas.

CHAPTER IX.

THE SISTERS SEE THE TRACES OF THE STORM.

He that lacks time to mourn, lacks time to mend ;
Eternity mourns that. 'Tis an ill cure
For life's worst ills to have no time to feel them.
Where sorrow's held intrusive, and turn'd out,
There wisdom will not enter, nor true power,
Nor aught that dignifies humanity.

PHILIP VON ARTEVELDE.

THE glorious summer is past, the finest summer that England has seen for ages, and travellers are turning homewards, shrinking from the lengthening darkness and the falling leaves.

Our group of tourists are among the last to leave the Continent. They linger at beau-

tiful Thun, till the hotel gardens have become a wilderness, and the pretty toy chapel lately so crowded, and presenting such a true miniature of a popular London church, boasts no other worshippers than themselves, and they hear that the very chaplain is migrating on the morrow. So Sir Robert sighs, and sees his fate to be inevitable; he must return to England and society, and receive and answer letters like other people.

They travel through France, and linger awhile in Paris; so when London is reached, and Mr. Aylmer receives the long-expected summons to fetch his daughter home, October has already given place to the month of ill name, November.

Mr. Aylmer takes out a third-class ticket and travels up to London, very little relishing his accommodation or travelling companions, now that economy necessitates third-class

fares. He glances at his daughter's letter.

"Aunt and uncle are going to stay at Claridge's for a few days, till they can transact their business, previous to returning to the country ; but I thought we had better go to Madame Eucrinaz, so I have written to propose it to her. Perhaps you will get a bed at Herbert's lodgings—what is he doing in London, now that the term has begun?"

Mr. Aylmer sighed, and gave himself up to the plan arranged by his daughter. On arriving at Paddington he took a cab to Thames Street, and repaired at once to the office where his son was employed. Herbert received him cordially.

"Where are you staying?" he asked.

"I want you to get me a bed at your lodgings, my boy. Your sisters are with Madame Eucrinaz, at Sydenham, and your uncle is at Claridge's. After all that has

passed—Mahala's affairs, I mean—I must not think of putting up at a grand hotel. Can you not manage me a shake-down?"

Herbert coloured slightly, and, for a moment, his manner was embarrassed.

"My lodgings are situated as inconveniently as possible, and are too—too humble. After all that I have cost you, father, I was bent on economizing, and I could not take either you or my sisters to my poor place. But wait a few minutes, and I will manage for you; just let me speak to Barford."

He darted into an office where several clerks were employed, and returned with a short broad-set man, whom Richard Iveson would have recognized as Lord Dungarret's steward.

"My friend, Mr. Barford," Herbert said.

Mr. Aylmer was just wiping his spectacles; by some unaccountable vagary of the atmosphere the good man's eyesight had become

clouded from the moment his son had been reluctantly compelled to explain the poverty of his lodgings, and he now dashed at Mr. Barford, and wrung his hand with an *empressement* that he would hardly have given way to had he been able to study that gentleman's countenance.

"I am rejoiced that my son has such a friend," gasped the old gentleman in his absence of judgment.

"Much obliged sir. Hope you will put up at my place, sir. I hang out at Walworth—quite *en route* for Sydenham. I have always a bed for a friend or a friend's friend, sir."

"You are most kind and hospitable, but I am ashamed to intrude upon you——"

Mr. Barford stopped his apologies by an impatient wave of the hand, and, muttering something about "business," dived back into the office, winking at Herbert as he passed.

Herbert looked annoyed, but recovered his command of countenance instantaneously, and father and son sallied forth for Sydenham.

The girls were enraptured to see them, and Rose clung about Herbert, admiring his increased manliness and grace. Herbert shrank from her admiration, much as he used to enjoy it, which when Madame Eucrinaz remarked, as she opened and shut her eyes in her usual rapid way, she began to entertain better hopes of him.

“And how many more exhibitions have you got, and how soon shall you be a fellow?” she asked.

Herbert now blushed outright, and his face expressed real pain.

“I have left Oxford,” he said in a low tone; “it would be kinder and wiser if you would reserve such personal questions for a private interview, Rose.”

Rose's eyes filled with tears; she looked penitent and embarrassed. Madame Eucrinaz raised her eyebrows and plunged into a vehement discussion on the distinctive characteristics of French and English society with Mr. Aylmer; and Isabel glanced penetratingly from her father to her brother, and back again, noting the worn look and silvered hair of the one, and the embarrassment of the other, and drawing her own conclusions.

"Our father is bent on travelling back to Chalkley to-morrow, so we had better adjourn to Exeter Hall for the Oratorio to-night. I have a couple of tickets, and we can doubtless get two more at the door."

"Get one more," interrupted Mr. Aylmer; "I want to see my brother, and get early to my quarters. But an Oratorio will be a great treat to the girls."

"Let me go with you, papa. I don't like

you knocking about alone, and then the two tickets will suffice for Herbert and Rose."

Mr. Aylmer consented to this arrangement for divers reasons, and the quartette divided.

"What has been wrong with Herbert, dear papa?" asked Isabel; "and why did you keep us in ignorance of it?"

"Ah! my child," replied the old man, "it has been a sad year, sad and sorrowful! It was not vice in Herbert, only weakness, vanity, and extravagance, and heavy debt as the result, debt which has swept away all my private funds! Then Mahala and Mercy have turned out ill—Mahala has been a thief, and worse, and had to be dismissed at a minute's warning. She cursed your mother, and so terrified her that she has been worse ever since. Then Mercy disappeared; I do believe the poor child ran away for very shame about her sister, but I have utterly

failed in getting any trace of her. Mahala I have traced."

"Oh! papa, why did you not recall us? Surely we ought to have returned. It seems horrible that we should have been enjoying ourselves, and you in such grief!"

"Well, love, your mother and I thought it better to bear it all in quiet. We wish to conceal Herbert's fault from his uncle and aunt. He was very ill for a time, and suffered tortures of self-reproach, your mother says, and since then he has been very steady and satisfactory. His kind friend, Lord Dungarret, got him a situation in the Customs, and he is working hard, and trying to save in order to help us. We are sorely pressed, Isabel, for Mahala's thefts have run us into debt everywhere, and I have now only my professional income."

"Papa, darling, do listen to me. It was

only yesterday that a lady was asking my aunt to recommend a companion for her daughter. It was to be a young lady who would read and practise with the girl, and enter into all her pursuits. Let Rose or me take this situation, just until your hands are freer. I will gladly take it, if Rose will attend to mamma and the schools."

"I should not like Rose to go out," said Mr. Aylmer, thoughtfully. "She is so impulsive that no one can guess what she might do. I could rely absolutely on your judgment, my child, and the salary would be a great help to us—but—we should sorely miss you, especially at Christmas."

"I might get leave to come then, papa. And a year or two will soon pass over. If Herbert is really in earnest, he will soon manage to pay back a part of what you have advanced for him; and if I can clear off

Mahala's speculations, all may go smoothly. You will let me talk the matter over with my aunt? You know I can generally get her to see matters in the same light I do."

Her father gave his consent, and she ran up the broad staircase in Claridge's Hotel, full of a new and high purpose.

It was very late at night when the sisters found themselves alone in one of the familiar bed-rooms in Madame Eucrinaz's house. Herbert and Rose had called for Isabel after the Oratorio, and Herbert had accompanied his sisters to Sydenham, and had there taken his leave, to repair to his own distant quarters.

But the weary girls did not retire to rest. Isabel opened her plan to her sister, and reasoned her out of all objections, as she had done with her aunt. Rose wept at first, but soon acquiesced, and though the story of her

parents' grief during the summer made life look more serious in her eyes than it had ever done before, it did not seem altogether joyless.

“Oh! Isabel,” she exclaimed, “I was almost forgetting to tell you that I believe, nay, I am certain, that I have seen Mercy! There was a crowded place, and omnibusses were standing, and people thronging in and out; it was a long way before we got to Exeter Hall, and there was a great riding-school near. We had become entangled behind a waggon, and a horse fell, and so we had to stay quiet for a time. A dirty ugly 'bus stopped near us, and Mercy stepped out. I knew her face at once; it is prettier than ever, and she looks quite a lady, only there is an expression of care in her countenance. I exclaimed, ‘Oh! Mercy! Mercy Broad!’ and Herbert was quite angry with me, and

said I should be taken for a mad woman. He maintained it was not Mercy Broad, and he declared that our Mercy had dark eyes and hair as brown as yours. I couldn't have imagined he would so soon have forgotten what our pet Mercy was like."

Isabel looked puzzled.

"Did you not notice where she got out of the omnibus? She may be a servant in that neighbourhood."

"Oh no, Isabel, she looked quite like a lady, and had a muff and a pretty shopping bag."

"I can't understand Herbert's want of memory regarding her appearance, and I wholly disbelieve it," replied Isabel. "I hope I am not uncharitable, but I cannot help suspecting that he is still acting a part, though what motive could induce him to profess obliviousness of poor Mercy Broad, I cannot divine. However, we will leave that; as I shall be at

Bayswater all winter, perhaps I may be able to persuade him to come a good deal to me, and so keep him out of the company that leads him astray."

Mr. Aylmer, in the meanwhile, was received at Mr. Barford's house by a disagreeable looking woman, who assumed a very familiar manner, offered him supper, and ridiculed his profession of weariness in a coarse jesting tone. It was very late when he heard Mr. Barford come in, and when he departed in the morning neither his host nor hostess had risen.

Mr. Aylmer wished he had incurred the expense of an hotel, and changed his opinion about the advantage of such friends for his son.

Herbert met his father and sisters at the station. On hearing of Isabel's engagement as companion to a young lady at Bayswater, he started and coloured deeply. He looked

annoyed when he met Isabel's searching glance, and said hurriedly,

"Is this step absolutely necessary, father? You are surely aware how much we shall lose caste by it?"

"It really is necessary, my boy," replied the father. "I know that merely worldly people attach a notion of disgrace to a girl's earning her own living; but real people do not do so, and it is only the approbation of these that we should covet. You are straining every nerve to help in this emergency, and it is right that Isabel should also put her shoulders to the wheel."

Herbert slightly shrugged his shoulders, but the bell rang, and he had no more opportunity for remonstrance. Away puffed the train, and he remained on the platform with Isabel.

"Can you walk with me to Claridge's?" she asked, and her brother consented.

“Rose says she saw Mercy Broad yesterday,” remarked Isabel interrogatively, looking steadily in his face. Herbert coloured deeply.

“Isabel!” he exclaimed, “you are unkind and suspicious. What have I done that I am to be tormented about those odious Broads? That thief Mahala writes to my father that he had better ask me about Mercy! Why should such hints be thrown out? How can you demean yourself by taking the same line? Even Rose was ready to insinuate that I was trying to throw dust in her eyes, because I insisted that a yellow-haired woman getting out of a ’bus was larger and fairer than our last housemaid. You are all most ungenerous—I have done wrong in one respect, and now there is no conceivable villainy that you do not lay at my door!”

Isabel was stunned with his vehemence. She assured him that she had never heard

Mahala's accusation, had never formed any definite opinion regarding Mercy, &c.; indeed the rest of the walk was spent in soothing his outraged feelings, and his sister learned a lesson of tact in her dealings with him. She might coax and watch, but not question.

CHAPTER X.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

Hier musz ich sie finden !
 Ich sah sie verschwinden,
 Ihr folgte mein Blick.
 Sie kam mir entgegen,
 Dann trat sie verlegen
 Und schamroth zurück.
 Ist's Hoffnung, sind's Träume ?
 Ihr Felsen, ihr Bäume,
 Entdeckt mir die Liebste
 Entdeckt mir mein Glück !

GOETHE.

CHRISTMAS approached, and the London shops were dressed with all that could attract the eye or please the appetite ; and rich people looked on approvingly, and bought largely,

admiring their own generosity the while ; and the poor looked on and envied, and felt hunger and cold worse to bear for the contrast with the general abundance.

But it is a very different Christmas at Upper Chalkley from what it was last year. Mr. Aylmer does indeed buy beef for the poor, but he and his family sacrifice their own Christmas dinner in consequence, only affording one or two mince pies for their single servant. The absent members do not return for the festive season, for travelling expenses are heavy, and there is no feast to come to.

And Mahala works hard all day, for a large party meets at her master's house ; and as the men retail the gossip of the dining-room, she hears them say that Lord Dungarret is the finest gentleman there ; but one questions this opinion, declaring that his cousin is still more polished.

“That ain’t his cousin, though, and he be no blood relation,” interrupted another flunky ; “his name is Haylmer, and, although he’s so like my lord, he’s nothing akin to him.”

“What’s his other name ?” asked Mahala.

“My lord’s ? Oh ! Frederick.”

“No, not my lord’s, the other gentleman’s as is like him.”

“Erbut, my dear ; Mr. Erbut Haylmer is on his cards, he often leaves one on my governor.”

“Where does he live ?” asked Mahala.

“It’s the club address on his card, my dear. Does he happen to be a beau of yours ?”

This was meant for a *bon mot*, for Mahala’s beauty had not increased since she left Chalkley, but greatly the contrary.

Mahala saw the rudeness of the intention, and walked angrily out of the servants’ hall.

It was a sad Christmas for her. At night she was too weary to sleep, and as she thought and thought, the past looked dark and the future darker, and no hope shone anywhere.

Rose wept in her chamber, though she had compelled herself to be gay before her parents. They, too, had acted a cheerful part before her, but when alone they sat silent and care-worn. And Isabel wept, for she was alone for the first Christmas in her life; and Mercy wept, for she too was alone, only her long night was spent in waiting for one who never came, so her watch was the most weary of all.

And Alice Hilary? Had Christmas brought her the hoped-for reunion? Alas! no; sickness had visited Fair Oaks, and laid one and another of those lovely children on a bed of suffering. Alice had taken the fever, too, and was too ill to grieve that only hired nurses

were there to tend her. She dreamed at times of a rugged manly face, whose eyes, so cold to others, ever beamed tenderly on her ; she heard his foot treading softly on the gravel outside, and on the carpet within ; she saw him in the balcony looking into her room, and once she felt him bend over her and kiss her brow.

All this she believed to be the dream of delirium ; and no one undeceived her, for the hired nurse was paid to conceal the fact that he had thrice taken the long journey all the way from Yorkshire, and that, on Christmas-day, he had actually purchased permission to enter the sick-room and steal a kiss from the fever patient.

But frost and wind came presently, and lifted the white fog from the river, splitting the clouds into shreds, and sweeping the heavens clean ; and then the fever abated,

and the sufferers arose with clearer heads and very feeble bodies, and pulses as low as they had been recently high, but with the instinct to strive for fresh life.

Elsie was one of the first to creep forth, to breathe the fresh air of spring. It was very early in March when she first ventured beyond the gates, and she would not have done so then, but that she heard of the illness of a child in whom she had taken a great interest. She begged some grapes and jellies from the housekeeper, and strolled forth as far as a pretty cottage beside the towing-path, where her little *protégée* lived.

The cottage garden was gay with snow-drops and crocuses, and blue and pink hepatica stars, and the sunny plots had a joyous look in the spring sunshine, which brought a more hopeful expression into poor Elsie's pale face than had beamed there of late.

A door opening into a little portico stood ajar, and she entered, knocking at an inner door, and listening for an answer, while her thoughts pictured the same sunshine lying on the broad brown moors, and perhaps tempting forth the spring flowrets in her own little garden.

A voice said, "Come in," and Elsie entered. The child she sought was not there, but a stranger in her place.

The stranger was a gentleman. Slender, and with the traces of recent illness in his face, he reclined in an easy-chair, as if needing its support. He was very fair, and a broad ray of sunshine falling obliquely upon him from behind, made his waving hair and beard shine like pure gold; while a tame bullfinch, standing on his head, played with the glossy locks, throwing them on this side and that, as the harvesters might do with

standing corn. His long thin fingers were laid upon a cage, in which a lark was imprisoned ; a small spray of chickweed held between them tempted the bird to eat.

Though it has taken some time to give this description, the whole was photographed upon the susceptible perceptions of Alice Hilary during the few moments which she employed in apologising for her intrusion, and ere he could rise to ring for some one to attend to her, she had glided away.

She entered a door opposite to the one she had left, and there found the invalid she sought. The little one was overjoyed to see her ; the height of her fever was past, and she sat in a little chair by the fire. Alice seated herself on the stool, and bending over the child, displayed her grapes and jelly, and won fresh exclamations of joy from the fevered

lips. On leaving the cottage she stooped to gather a few of the sunny flowers, but in opening the gate she let a rosy star fall. She was going to stoop for it, but she saw the gentleman watching her intently from the window, so she hastened away, the embarrassment and unwonted exertion painting her pallid cheek with the tint of the monthly rose.

As soon as she was gone the gentleman threw a cloak round him, exchanged his red slippers for walking boots, and taking his hat, sallied forth. At the gate he dropped on one knee, reverently took up the pink hepatica blossom, and pressed it to his lips; then he laid it in his pocket-book, and returned it to his breast pocket. He gained a turn in the towing-path just in time to see the last fold of Elsie's dress as she turned into the main road. He followed in that direction.

All day his mind was full of her, but all his exertions and questionings could only ascertain her name and place of abode. He waited day by day, hoping that she would come again, but she came not. Meanwhile the health he had come to Windsor in search of returned all the faster for the new bent given to his thoughts.

He wandered round Fair Oaks; he hired a boat and rowed past the gardens; sometimes he caught a glimpse of a black draped figure playing croquet with children on the lawn, sometimes he saw her emerge from the gates in the chariot, but whenever he watched he saw a large untidy woman run in or out, and heard a loud voice calling "Ella," or "Lina," or "Alice." He knew the last to be *her* name, and his heart beat at the sound.

One day he had the great delight of meeting Miss Hilary in company with "big Miss

Gerald," as the people with whom he lodged told him the large lady was called. He stood aside from their path, uncovering his head, and looking unutterable things at Alice, who merely bowed and passed on, with eyes fixed on the ground. But Annette said, "*Bon jour*" in her most winning style, taking him for a French count, which indeed he closely resembled.

Scarcely had he passed on when Annette exclaimed,

"Alice, I am sure that is some very distinguished person. Perhaps a French spy, or an ambassador, or perhaps a Russian prince travelling *incognito*. I believe he was very much struck with me—what fun it will be if he gets up a grand romance, goes through endless adventures to win me, and when papa and mamma have forbidden him the house, and I have run away with him (for I think at

my age I ought to be the arbitrator of my own destiny, you know), for him to turn out such a grand seignior, that mamma will be fit to die of jealousy that she did not get him for Ella or Lina !”

“ A very pretty *château en Espagne*, Annette. I am sorry to have to act the part of a rude boy in the play, and knock your fine castle down. The French spy, ambassador, or Russian prince, is a simple English gentleman—a Mr. Smith, from some large office in London; he has had a sharp attack of illness, and has come to Windsor for change of air.”

“ Well, I never ! Then you know him ?”

“ Oh ! no, I don't know him. Jenny Mather told me all that.”

“ Then you may depend on it he is disguising himself. I am positively convinced that his name is no more Smith than mine

is. No, no, Alice, we are certainly on the threshold of a startling romance !”

Alice changed the subject. She was less indifferent than she tried to appear. In fact, she had thought far oftener of the mysterious stranger than her own reason approved of her doing, and she resented his appropriation by Annette with a vividness which alarmed herself.

“ Ah !” she thought, “ I wish George or Richard were here ; it is terrible to have no one at hand to care for one, no one to confide in.”

She felt restless and uneasy, and, professing weariness, soon persuaded Annette to proceed alone, and returned to Fair Oaks. She met Mr. Gerald in the hall, who accosted her thus :

“ You look moped to death, Alice, like all the rest of us. I can stand it no longer, and I have been issuing half-a-dozen invitations for Easter. If ladies are afraid of infec-

tion, they can stay away—gentlemen are much more adventurous, and much more to my taste. I have asked Mr. Pratt, the popular preacher, for Annette, Mr. Iveson for you, Sir Henry Armstrong and Mr. Vansittart for Ella and Lina, and two or three for Mr. Gerald and myself. We must pick up stray men for dinner, to make a variety from day to day, and we must arrange charades, and water-parties, and pic-nics, and illuminations. It will be new life to us all. And the dresses—oh! we must summon Mrs. Mode, and have a thorough consultation.”

“Let me put a note in to Mr. Iveson first,” said Alice, “then I will come to the consultation.”

She seized a pen eagerly, and wrote:

“Do come, dear Richard. I have a strange mixture of hope and of dread in my mind, as if some coming event was casting its shadow

before. There is much I could say to you, but cannot write; much more that I could neither write nor say, but that your quick penetration would discover. You won't like the party that will assemble here in Easter week, but you will come because I have need of you."

Having written thus, and put the note in her cousin's envelope, she could give her attention to the intricacies of the intended changes of toilette, and noted down orders for tarlatan, and silk, jet ornaments, and white floral trimmings; also throwing herself into Mrs. Gerald's interests about her own and the girl's wardrobes, in a manner which won so much of the heart of that lady as the claims of the world and her babies had spared.

Ere they had finished their arrangements Annette entered, and Mrs. Gerald's brow clouded at sight of her.

“What is to be done for Annette?” she exclaimed; “she has not a dress fit to put on, and I dare say her next quarter’s allowance is condemned.”

“Of course it is,” rejoined Annette; “I owe for my geological cabinet, and my new bilocular telescope. But I have a beautiful wreath, and trimmings of artificial holly, and misletoe, and with a white dress they will make out a capital costume.”

“Good gracious, Annette! That white dress is in holes all over, and who could wear holly and misletoe at Easter? If you had had a grain of common sense, which you have not, you would never have bought artificial holly when real holly is far prettier, and always to be had in abundance at the only season that it is admissible. You must inevitably have two new evening dresses and one for morning.”

“Then papa must pay for them—I can’t,” said Annette, sulkily.

Mrs. Gerald looked much annoyed.

“I am half inclined to let you disgrace yourself by wearing the ragged old muslin and the unseasonable trimmings; but I suppose the blame would fall on me, not on your own stupid self. Would to heaven that some one would fancy you, and take you off my hands—but that they never will do!”

Annette cast a meaning glance at Alice.

“Wait a while, and you will see, mamma,” she said, triumphantly. “Perhaps everyone may not see me with your eyes. I shall buy a pretty French morning dress, cheap and very tasteful, and if you want to see me stunning in an evening, why, papa must come down with the needful.”

And she bustled away to the garden, for she had seen a slight figure, that she could

not mistake, enter a boat, and she was eager to act the part of Dryad in the shrubbery.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WORK OF THE WHIRLWIND.

Tu delle fiere
Più fiero ancora.
Alle Preghiere
Di chi t'adora
Spogli il tuo petto
D'ogni pietà.

METASTASIO.

“I shall put a stop to this daily going to church,” said Mrs. Gerald, on the Wednesday in Holy Week, as Annette and Alice entered the dining-room at luncheon time. “Alice looks ready to faint, and Annette has been crying; her eyes are red and swollen, and it makes her face look larger than ever.”

"Please let me go on with the daily service, Cousin Gertrude," said Alice, drawing her chair to the fire, and eating her biscuits there. "It is a great comfort to me, and I know papa would have liked me to do it."

"But what call have you to dash yourself in pieces, Annette? The more you take out of yourself, the more you put in; and so extra exertion makes you fatter and fatter. You have finished the cold fowl, and I believe you will finish the loaf next."

Annette closed her eyes.

"Mamma, if you knew the weight of woe at my heart, you would restrain your sarcasms. But I will rather die than be a betrayer!"

Mrs. Gerald set down the glass of wine that she was in the act of raising to her lips. Ella and Lina turned full round from their places

by the fire, and regarded Annette, who was now sobbing, with both her hands before her face, and her broad elbows firmly planted on the table. The little girls gazed with open mouths, and Harrington and Ferdinand each profited by the occasion to perpetrate a joke suited to his especial taste ; the former hastening to pocket an orange, and the latter to anoint the tip of his step-sister's nose, which peeped between the outspread hands, with a spoonful of mustard.

As is the way of the world, the more venial offence met with the most speedy punishment. The moment the insulted feature felt the pungent application, the morbid mood gave way to presence of mind and activity ; and the victim of ill-requited love dealt her step-brother a sounding blow on the off-ear, and seconded it by another on the near one, for impartiality's sake, which flushed the insolent

young face for the remainder of the morning.

“It really serves you right, Ferdinand,” said his mother, in answer to his appeal to her. “If you can’t let your sister alone, you must expect to feel the weight of her hands.”

Ferdinand retired discomfited, and the rest of the party betook themselves to their various haunts. All were curious about the cause of Annette’s affliction; but no one thought it advisable, after the little episode just related, to intrude questions upon her.

Alice went to her little dressing-room, which the afternoon sun had made as warm as a conservatory. Here she busied herself with a picture of her beloved moorland country, hastily sketched during the months which in retrospect seemed so happy, and now receiving a careful finish, for the love of that “lang syne.” But she was not destined

to make much progress that afternoon.

The door burst open, and then closed violently, after admitting Miss Gerald, who immediately turned the key in the lock.

“ Alice !” she exclaimed, pushing her into a seat, and dropping on the ground beside her, in order to lay her head in her lap, “ my heart must speak or break !”

“ Then speak, dear,” said Alice kindly. “ I am so sorry you should be unhappy.”

“ Oh, Alice, say that he has not forsaken me ! Say that he will come again !”

Alice trembled now.

“ Who will come again ? I don’t understand you, Annette.”

“ Oh ! Alice, how dull your perceptions are ! I mean the prince.”

“ What, the gentleman on the towing-path ! —Mr. Smith ?”

“ He who for the nonce calls himself Smith,”

said Annette, oracularly. "Surely I am not mistaken in that noble face, those piercing eyes ! He would not look into my soul and pierce my heart with his glance, only to fling that wounded heart aside."

"Dear Annette, you are pining for a myth. Indeed, you are only deceiving yourself. That gentleman, be his name Smith or Jones, did or looked nothing that you can justly build hopes upon. I saw him by accident when I went to see little Amy Mather, and Jenny told me what I repeated to you. He is in some office in London ; his leave has expired, and he has gone back to work."

Annette smiled contemptuously.

"Listen, Alice," she said, "your own ignorance blinds you. Long before we met him on the towing-path he had his eye on me. I seldom came out of the gates but I saw a figure hiding among the trees in the adjacent

field ; I never went into the shrubbery, but, lo ! he was in a boat upon the river gazing upon me. Could a woman's heart resist such worship ? Can it avoid breaking when that worship is withdrawn ?”

Alice knew not what to answer. She saw a wholly different cause for Mr. Smith's constant haunting of the precincts of Fair Oaks ; but possibly her guess was as far from the truth as Annette's. The notion that such might be the case did not lessen her discomfort, but she called her good sense to her aid, and answered as it dictated.

“ Dear Annette, we know nothing at all about this man. He is very attractive in manner and appearance, but he may be low-born and of bad character——”

“ He is not,” interrupted Annette. “ He has the patent of nobility on his high fair brow, the seal of goodness in his clear pene-

trating eye. Evil tongues may have slandered me, designing wretches may have won his affections away, but the prince shall remain king of my heart, even though I have to cast the shivered thing at his feet."

"How long will you insist on believing thus? When will absence convince you that he has forgotten or never thought of you?"

Annette sprang to her feet.

"When I have sought London from one end to the other, when I have found my love, and heard my sentence from his lips, then, and only then, will I record against him the verdict, 'False to his own high nature!'"

Annette withdrew. Unlocking the door, she turned to Alice with dignified displeasure.

"Alice," she said, "when you came here I thought I saw in you capacities for aspiration,

and powers of sympathy. I destined you to become my second self, to share my lofty hopes, to take a part in my high efforts and imaginings. I have often been disappointed in you, but as often I have forgiven and turned again to hold out to you anew the possibility of my friendship. But to-day I have gauged both heart and soul, and find both shallow. I have always known that the great pay for their greatness is isolation ; but my over-sanguine nature has still hoped to find a soul-echo somewhere. Here, on this threshold, I lay down this hope, here I forswear all female friendships. Only in the higher, grander character of man shall I care henceforth to look for my counterpart—I go forth to seek the perfection of my being.”

Annette was gone ; and Alice, though pained to some extent, laughed quietly at her

magniloquence. But her laugh ended in a sigh, and she said softly,

“How thankful I ought to be for Richard’s brotherly friendship—a chat with him will set all this folly straight, and I shall be myself again.”

* * * * *

The course of true love, which was running so very tumultuously in the breast of poor Annette Gerald, was flowing on under sunny skies with Mr. Crompton and Miss Scraggs. Good Friday being a holiday, all the Scragg family were invited to Mr. Crompton’s lodging, and a jovial supper was served in china, and amid articles of vertu, which were rightfully the property of Mr. Aylmer. Miss Green, Miss Scraggs’s cousin, took great notice of all these things, and as a salad was handed in a china bowl, she whispered :

“You’ll have everything of the genteelest, dear ; quite in the style of the old families.”

A knock came at the door, and the landlady bore in a large parcel, an oblong box, securely covered with brown paper.

“Carriage paid,” she said, concisely ; “only sixpence for portorage.”

“What can it be?” whispered Miss Scraggs, with a giggle.

“A wedding present, to be sure,” rejoined Miss Green. “Everybody knows what’s to happen on Monday.”

“A parcel of London grocery,” said Crompton, who felt instinctively impelled to avoid opening the parcel in public.

“Do you say as how you go to London for grocery?” said Scraggs, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and looking with undisguised disgust at his intended son-in-law. “Well, I call that a queer way of treating your

customers. My opinion is, you should buy grocery of them as buys meat of you."

"And so I do," rejoined Crompton, who remembered opportunely that his father-in-law had a share in a grocery business, though, to the naked eye, he seemed a currier. "I buy every pound of sugar I use at your place, and if this here parcel contains groceries, they be a present from a friend in London."

"It'll be a present worth having, such a box as that, full of tea and coffee, and spices! It will go well with the housekeeping in the early days with such a stock beforehand!"

And he nudged his daughter, and winked knowingly.

"You might let us see the presents, Mr. Crompton," said Miss Green, who inherited a full share of the quality said to endow all the daughters of Eve. "I bet sixpence there's French plums there, or something more fan-

ciful than vulgar tea and sugar, something that ladies 'll like to look at, and maybe to taste."

"Well," put in Mrs. Scraggs, "tea and sugar's pretty things to them as has the care of housekeeping, and nothing smells nicer to my taste than tea-paper. If the things are a secret, I don't say nothing, though it do seem to me that secrets is ungenteel with one's own family, or as good as that."

"There's no secret," said Crompton, roughly. "I know no more about the box than you do, only I haven't got a hammer and chisel here to open it, and I thought I could do it after you was gone."

"Here's the oyster-knife. Stand out o' the way, and I'll open t'box wi' t'oyster-knife."

And acting, as usual, in direct opposition to orders, the three women clustered round the box, along with Mr. Scraggs, who carefully prised up the lid, nail by nail, while

Crompton looked on in stupid indifference.

Every nail was now loosened ; a heave top and bottom, and at each side, was given, and, at a nod from Scraggs, Miss Green and the bride-elect lifted the lid off ; but the object that met their view was very different from parcels of groceries.

The oblong box was lined with soft white flannel, and within it reposed a tiny infant. The face resembled a miniature of Crompton cut in ivory, and spiritualised by some angelic touch ; the little cap and frock were neat, and of spotless cleanliness ; and there was an expression of sadness in the baby features, as if the little taste of life which it had had, had been full of bitterness.

All stood as if paralysed, and Miss Green was the first to observe that a paper lay folded in the little ivory hand. She took it, and read aloud—

“You see here the body of your child. Its spirit awaits you on the day that is coming, when the dead as well as the living shall see God’s judgment on a woman’s betrayer. Vengeance takes long to ripen, but never sleeps.”

“Crompton, what does this mean?” cried Mrs. Scraggs, as soon as her parched lips could move; but he answered not. All turned to look at him.

More like a demon than a man, he glared with looks of horror at the child, and of defiance on those around him; then the flush of fury faded, and he became as pallid as the tiny corpse before him, and sank suddenly into a chair. Scraggs and his wife administered brandy, but Miss Green pointed from the corpse to the guilty father, and whispered to her cousin,

“It’s his very picter!”

“ Oh ! take me away, Melier, dear,” sobbed Miss Scraggs ; and her cousin tied on her bonnet and led her forth, another martyr to misplaced affection.

CHAPTER XII.

IVESON AWAKES FROM HIS DREAM.

Philip looked,
And in their eyes and faces read his doom ;
Then, as their faces grew together, groaned,
And slipt aside, and like a wounded life
Crept down into the hollows of the wood :
There, where the rest were loud and merrymaking,
Had his dark hour unseen, and rose and passed,
Bearing a life-long hunger in his heart.

ENOCH ARDEN.

“ Now, girls, take Sir Henry to see the church.
It is quite finished, Sir Henry, except for the
screen, and I think you will approve of it.
You will just have time to look over it before
the dressing-bell rings.”

Sir Henry bowed, and Ella and Lina, being already equipped in walking costume, testified their readiness to set forward.

"But will not Alice like to come?" asked Ella.

"Alice has gone to the station to meet her particular friend, Mr. Iveson," replied Mrs. Gerald, with marked meaning; "Mr. Vansittart will arrive by the same train."

The walking party set out. After proceeding along the main road for a couple of hundred yards, they turned to the left, and held on their way on the river's bank.

They had passed the pretty cottage inhabited by the Mathers, and saw a boatman securing his boat to a tiny pier, while a slender gentleman-like man bounded lightly up the bank. Sir Henry regarded him searchingly for a moment, and then advancing towards him with extended hand, he exclaimed,

“’Pon my soul, Lord Dungarret ! I thought you were out of England !”

The gentleman, whom we will still call by his assumed name of Smith, laughed a light, mirthful, ringing laugh.

“ Really, Sir Henry,” he replied, “ I was almost of the same opinion. I had made every arrangement to leave, but a mysterious cord drew me back again, and here I am. What are you doing here ?”

“ I am spending a merry Easter holiday at Fair Oaks. Come, and I will introduce you to two Miss Geraldts.”

“ Gladly ! But, Armstrong, I am very anxious for an introduction to Mr. Gerald. I want the *entrée* to the house.”

“ The easiest thing in the world ; Gerald shall call upon you to-morrow.”

“ Can you not take me there this evening ? I can spend to-morrow here, and then I must

return to London, and I should like to take the field to-morrow."

Sir Henry laughed a well-bred laugh, and Mr. Smith laughed an excited laugh. The baronet put his arm within that of his friend, and drew him to that part of the bank where Ella and Lina were making believe to throw their whole interest into the cares of a fisherman, who stood little chance of sport patiently as he waited for it.

"Allow me to introduce my friend, Lord Dungarret, young ladies," said Sir Henry, and the girls received the baron with stereotyped curtseys and original smiles.

The whole party proceeded to the church together, for there was a tone in Mrs. Gerald's commands, light and easy though they were, which neither children nor guests ever thought of disobeying; and though Sir Henry was longing to display his very creditable acquaint-

ance at Fair Oaks, and the girls were longing to see the triumph which would shine in their mother's eyes over the new acquisition, and the stranger was burning with the fever of expectation, yet none ventured to propose the omission of the ordained visit to the church ; nay, Sir Henry felt it his duty thoroughly to get the subject up, as if it was a matter of vital importance that he should be able to remonstrate with the curate at dinner time over the lack of part of the altar rail, the lowness of the pulpit, and the unsightly appearance of the bell-ropes in the western-porch.

In the meanwhile, the family chariot waited at the South Western station, and Alice sauntered up and down, in momentary expectation of the arrival of the train. She read and re-read the various advertisements posted up in such attractive type. "Fire-proof Starch," "Good Words," "Washing Machines," "Roof-

ing Felt," and "Reduction of Fares." She resolved on one more reading, and while thus engaged, the train puffed into the station.

She advances towards it; the door of a second-class carriage is thrown open, and a powerful man springs out before the train stops, and, after running a few paces with the imparted impetus, he advances towards Alice, and grasps both her hands.

"Dear Richard, how glad I am to see you!" she exclaimed; "I thought the train would never come!"

"I thought it travelled terribly slow. Are you here alone? I want to hear all you can tell me, for your letter has made me very anxious."

"You can neither hear nor see this evening, for another visitor is arriving by this train, but we will get a chat in the morning before we start for the boating excursion. Is

it not lucky that we have such wonderfully warm weather? It is like the legendary May rather than the actual April."

"These unnaturally warm days we call 'weather breeders' in the north, for bad weather always follows them. But I hope we shall have one for the water-party. I should tremble for my little sister to be on the water in worse weather than this, after her illness, too."

"Oh! I am quite well and strong now, and I was not so very ill. You must forget all that."

A servant came up to inquire what luggage Mr. Iveson had. Richard described his own portmanteau, and they went to the carriage where Mr. Vansittart was already seated. Alice introduced herself and her friend; the luggage was accommodated, and the horses trotted forward on the homeward route.

A maid-servant met them in the hall and whispered to Alice,

“Do come and let me dress you, miss; you are awfully late, and the gentlemen will dress more quickly than you.”

So, as Mr. Gerald came out to receive his guests, Alice bounded up the steps to her room, and resigned herself to the hands of Elise.

“I have had such trouble to get flowers for you, miss,” said the girl, as she handled the massive tresses of bronze hair; “Miss Gerald had got the only white camellias that the gardener had, and I couldn’t get them out of her nohow. But just before she began to dress she ran down to the library to get a book to read while I did her hair (I believe she gets off poetry at dressing time to repeat to the company during the evening; Mr. Swales caught her at it once, and found the

very piece afterwards when I got him the book), and then she came running back, and fell upstairs, and tore her new green gingham half the way round; and she came into her room looking quite out of her mind, and she said, 'Leave me, Elise, for a little time, and bring back the vase of flowers that Miss Alice put in the hall, that with the forget-me-nots in; I shall wear them—they are suggestive, which the camellias are not.' She said 'suggestive,' indeed, miss, for I noticed it, because it didn't sound sense, and I meant to ask Mr. Swales about it. I think she must have meant *en suite* with her turquoises, miss."

"I don't know what she meant, Elise. I suppose she was annoyed at the rent in her new gown."

"Lor, miss, not at all! She was quite beside herself with joy. I couldn't make out how it was till I was doing Miss Lina's hair;

but when she said, 'Make me very smart, Elise, for we have a great gentleman to dinner, a real lord,' I guessed what was in Miss Gerald's mind. Not that she need trouble herself, poor young lady, for with Miss Ella and Miss Lina so pretty and well-dressed, and with you, miss, the handsomest of all, it ain't likely as my lord would look at her."

Alice's mind was so full of varying thoughts, wondering how she could gain Iveson's sympathy, and yet feeling unable to give him any definite reason for seeking it, that she hardly heard the maid's gossip, and her only sensation was a little impatience at the tediousness of her operations. At last, however, the black silk dress was adjusted to the satisfaction of the waiting-maid, the camellias faultlessly grouped in hair and dress, and Alice glided to the drawing-room, entering it just as the butler appeared on the other side

of the hall, bearing the announcement of the dinner being ready.

Alice closed the door behind her. A slight man stood near it, conversing with Richard Iveson ; he turned as Alice entered, his expressive face beaming with emotion, joy shining in every feature.

“I cannot ask for an introduction to Miss Hilary,” he said, taking her unresisting hand ; “though in one sense unknown to each other, in another and finer sense we have been friends for nearly four weeks.”

As his slender hand grasped hers, Alice felt he took possession of her. One moment she raised her eyes, and encountered the look of admiration, love, triumph, beaming there ; the next he had placed her hand on his arm, ready to follow Mr. Gerald to the dining-room.

Mrs. Gerald looked annoyed, but recovered her composure in a moment.

“Sir Henry,” she said, “you must please be my esquire, as Lord Dungarret has engaged Miss Hilary ; Mr. Vansittart and Mr. Thompson will take Ella and Lina, and Mr. Iveson will lead the way with Miss Gerald. It is quite lucky that the vicar didn’t accept—we should have had one gentleman too many.”

Richard Iveson once more sat opposite to Alice, and this time he had no interruption in observing her. Alice looked far lovelier than ever before, far more attractive, yet she was very quiet—she seldom spoke, still seldomer moved. Lord Dungarret spoke constantly to her in a low tone, and her head was bent slightly towards him, so as not to lose a single whisper ; as each dish was handed, he helped her to it, or rejected it in her name ; he filled her glass, called for fresh water for her, put fruit on her plate, and threw aside the crackers

which Lina was eagerly distributing to all. He seemed to know by instinct her lightest wish, and to act with confidence on that knowledge, and she luxuriated in his perfect comprehension.

All this Richard Iveson saw. He read the actions of love by the light of the patient love within himself, and he saw how the young nobleman took as a right what he had lacked the courage to accept when simply offered.

But this was not all he read during that prolonged dinner hour. He read the terrible truth—read it as plain as if it had been engraven like Belshazzar's fate upon the wall—"Alice Hilary loves now, and has never loved before." Poor inexperienced Richard! His honest heart having been only once touched, and by that touch won for ever, could not discriminate between the frank, cordial, open-eyed affection of friendship, and

the trembling, thrilling, shrinking, passion of love! There—as he said “yes,” or “no” to entrées, game, and sweets, or shook his head, or touched his glass to “Hock or champagne, sir?” “Sherry or Madeira, sir?” “Claret or Assmanshauser, sir?”—he called up all the loving words that Elsie had given him—all her confiding looks, and trusting ways; and to all he now assigned the true motive—“sisterly affection.” His throat was dry, his face pale, his countenance stern, for his life-spring was cut off.

And Annette. She shot fierce glances at Alice; but the long lashes rested on the flushed cheek, and Annette’s angry looks fell innocuously on her. Then she cast reproachful looks at Lord Dungarret, but he was too pre-occupied to notice them. She refused every dish, expecting to attract Mr. Iveson’s sympathy, but he did not observe; and Mr.

Thompson was too much engrossed in a play of wit with Lina to remark the distress of his left-hand neighbour. It was only when the children came in to dessert that Harrington noticed—

“Annette hasn’t got any of her favourite preserves.”

Mr. Thompson turned to give her some, but she burst into a violent fit of weeping, then laughing loudly said,

“It’s very delightful—I am so happy!” Then laughed again, and ended in screams, sobs, gasps, and every symptom of violent hysterics.

Mrs. Gerald stood beside her massive step-daughter.

“Control yourself, Annette,” she said sternly. Then addressing her husband, she added, “Take her out of the room.”

He obeyed, supporting his daughter as best

he could—the wild demonstrations checked for the time by the firm eye of the matron.

The door closed, the ladies had vanished. Richard Iveson heaved a deep sigh, complained of a distracting headache, and sauntered out into the garden.

All was dark and still there. He made his way through the shrubberies, reached the bank of the river, where the weeping willow still stood, laving its ever thirsty branches, and throwing himself on the gravel beneath its shade, he gave himself up to the bitter reflections which were well-nigh driving him mad.

Elsie was awakened from her dream of Elysium by Annette's loud demonstrations. She followed her to her room, whither Mr. Gerald conducted her, offering her all the soothing sympathy in her power ; but at her approach Annette became wilder than ever.

“Venture not to approach your victim, traitress !” she cried. “You may chance to come too near to behold your work. A worm will turn when trampled on, and a betrayed woman may do the same. Avaunt, viper, insulting wretch, avaunt !”

“Go away, Alice,” said Mrs. Gerald. “Annette, let there be an end of this folly, or I shall send for Gardener, with his syringe, and try the water-cure. How can you be such a fool !”

“Oh, mamma, mamma,” sobbed Annette, “my heart is broken ! She has taken him from me—the cruel, heartless wretch, the designing viper, the——”

But her period was shortened by the outraged stepmother, who grasped the ewer, and flung the contents in the swollen face of the hysterical patient. Annette gasped, but thought it better to control herself, and Mrs.

Gerald desired Mode to remain beside her, and repeat the application if the cries should recur. She then repaired to the drawing-room, declaring herself "quite worn out by that most aggravating girl."

Lord Dungarret was not long before he joined the ladies, and he placed himself beside Elsie at once. Lina pouted, and declared she was weary for want of something to do, and must have a game of croquet. Mr. Gerald, ever indulgent, especially to her, gave orders for lights to be placed on the croquet ground, and the footman and groom went to execute his command. With great ingenuity they attached candles to the croquet bridges, hung coloured lamps, once the adornments of a vast Christmas tree, among the shrubs, and were advancing to dispose some lights among the branches of the weeping willow, when Mr. Iveson emerged from beneath its shade.

He noticed their looks of curiosity, and remarking quietly, "I am distracted with headache, tell your master I have gone to my room," he disappeared down one of the dark avenues.

And the gay crowd came out; the bright young figures in their rose-coloured dresses and glittering jewelry; Mrs. Gerald and Mrs. Thompson, their matron dignity clothed in velvet and lace; the children with their white fairy-like robes and floating cloud of golden ringlets, and the sombre draped figure of Alice as queen of the night, without jewelry or ornament, or aught beyond but the mighty charm of her high pure womanhood.

The gentlemen were eager for the game, and played with spirit, though the unwonted conditions of the occasion precluded skill. A merry Babel of sounds echoed through the darkness; the gay laugh of Lina, the more

gentle one of Ella, the shouts of the children, the cheers of the men, all were distinctly recognised by Richard Iveson, as he listened beneath the bushes, and missed the only voice that was music in his ear. Suddenly he was startled by those familiar tones close to him, just on the other side of a tall arbutus.

“Has your lordship seen anything of my friend, Mr. Iveson?”

“Not since he left the dining-room. But I heard a servant say to Mr. Gerald that he was ill, and had gone to bed.”

“Ill! Dear Richard! I fear he has lacked care. I will go in, and send some one to him.”

“Mrs. Gerald went to look after him. You cannot be needed. Do stay with me, I want to speak of your brother.”

Alice allowed herself to be persuaded, and she seated herself on a mound beside the

arbutus, and Lord Dungarret spoke as he wished.

“ I have been so unhappy as to cause you pain during the past, Miss Hilary. At college I was your brother’s friend; we went wrong together, and lost money; I had then the needful, and he borrowed of me. You know the rest. What I did, I did thoughtlessly, and I only threatened prosecution when so hard up myself that I dared not venture out of my own house, except by stealth. Since you have looked into my soul, I have hated my past life, and have longed to begin a new one. Say that you forgive the past, and all my future shall be spent in proving to you, to George, to all, that I can aid my fellows more than I have ever injured them.”

“ I do forgive you, my lord. But—”

“ Yes, it was a heavy wrong, and so much

the more generous is your pardon. You shall never regret it."

He had taken her hand, and raised it to his lips.

"Please speak to me no more now," she said, trembling. "If you will talk all about George over with Mr. Iveson and me to-morrow, I shall be very glad, but I can bear no more to-night."

"Mr. Iveson is your man of business?" said Lord Dungarret, somewhat haughtily.

"He is that, but so much more! My father's valued friend, and George's and my dear brother."

Lord Dungarret bowed, and Alice rose quietly and led the way towards the house. A short half hour, and silence and darkness reigned uninterruptedly.

CHAPTER XIII.

IVESON ACCEPTS HIS LOT, AND ANNETTE TAKES
HEART OF GRACE.

And holding life as so much pelf
To buy her posies, learns therefore
He does not rightly love himself,
Who does not love another more.

COVENTRY PATMORE.

THAT was the longest, darkest, dreariest night that Richard Iveson ever knew, and all night long he fought a terrible battle. It was like Jacob wrestling with the angel. The deepest depth of evil, love perverted to revenge, fought with the highest height of good, love

perfected in self-sacrifice; and the battle being fought at the foot of the cross, truth won the victory, then and for ever.

“Let me watch over her, and guard her. Let me be a joy and blessing to her, and I here lay down my every earthly hope of happiness, to live for her, and forget self altogether.” And as the solemn vow was recorded, the darkness broke, and little by little stole the morning ray over the bowed form crouching on the floor, till presently a golden beam tempted him to rise, and lo! the river was flowing by like dancing gold, and the shrubs were clothed with foliage all edged with glory, and the fair lawn glittered with diamonds!

He threw open the window to inhale the freshness, then bathed his throbbing head, and threw himself on the couch, courting a brief season of repose. Exhaustion had succeeded excitement, and nature cried out for rest, so

sleep fell speedily upon the weary being, and for a time his griefs were forgotten.

And he dreamed that Dungarret and Alice sat in two water-lilies on a golden stream, and that he saw the floods coming down breast high, as they sometimes did in his own north country, and that he cried to them, and they did not heed ; and then he plunged into the water, caught the long stalks of the two lily flowers, and dashed the blossoms and their contents on to the adjacent lawn ; and then he saw the flood towering over him, and he gasped in horror, and with that gasp he awoke to hear the footman knocking at his door, and telling him it was time to rise.

And how had Annette borne herself during that night ?

Mrs. Gerald visited her last thing, having drawn from Alice some portion of the young lady's recent ravings, which shed a flood of

light on her present state, so the clear-headed matron had got her cue.

“Annette,” she said, “I am sorry for you, for you were born a fool, and therefore it is less your fault than your misfortune that you are so. For the last ten years, ever since you came home to me from that odious boarding-school, I have been trying to teach you to wait before falling in love till you were sure that the object of such love entertained some sentiment regarding you. You know you wanted to die for Captain Kelly, and he did not even remember your name ; and you were quite broken-hearted when the vicar married, though he had paid you less attention than any other girl in the parish. Now you go and become desperately enamoured of an adventurous stranger, who, taking a passion for Alice at first sight, haunts her path in a transparent incognito, till you please to fancy he is haunt-

ing yours. If you have any sense to fall back upon, do call it to your aid. At this moment Alice has two devoted lovers, and she cannot accept both. If Mr. Iveson does not commit suicide during the night, he will be open to consolation in the morning; make him your object, and see if you don't win him. But don't fall in love with him till you see some evidence of liking on his side; or if you can't help falling in love with him, don't let him see that you have done so. Now, good night; wash your face, and I will send Mode to put your room to rights. I expect to see you tidy and in good spirits in the morning."

So Annette rose, and cast aside the weeds of her intended widowhood, and sent to tell Elise by no means to go to bed till she had mended her gingham dress, and ironed it over, for she should want to look very well next day for the water-party.

But Alice courted sleep in vain. To her life seemed to stand still, paralysed with the intoxicating fact that earth contained a Lord Dungarret. Her heart beat faster, her pulses throbbed fuller, her eyes glowed with a new light; she did not look forward, still less backward, her whole being was absorbed in the intense joy of the present. She allowed Elise to undress her, heard her murmurs of satisfaction that "Miss Alice had looked so well all the evening," and her wonder that "somehow she never seemed to want ornaments," but never answered. When left alone she prayed, but it was all about Dungarret. She remembered a passage in Robertson's sermon upon "the sympathy of Jesus," which said that every joy or sorrow that moved the heart of man thrilled up to the heart of Christ; and possessed by this idea, she knelt to tell her divine brother of the new

light and heat that had arisen in her life. Then she lay down among her soft pillows, to realise again and again the vast joy of love, the gladness of the present, simple gladness and rejoicing, too triumphant for hope, too soul-pervading for fear.

She did not sleep, but the morning light found her fevered and stimulated, not exhausted; her beauty intensified and spiritualised by the exultant soul within.

Lord Dungarret, too, was possessed by a spirit of exultation. He had lain long awake rejoicing in his success, and harassing his mind by no thought for the future. He knew that there were difficulties in his way, but for the first time in his life he had found the counterpart of his being, and he would win her at whatever cost.

The party met at breakfast, bearing little external mark of their various experiences

during the night. Richard Iveson was grave, and looked ill, but his manner had all the quiet tenderness which had made him so welcome a companion in Colonel Hilary's sick chamber ; and as he looked fondly down on Alice, while he took her hand, she felt that he was *au fait* with her secret, without her uttering a word of it, and that he gave her his full and tender sympathy. Annette, too, was quieter than usual, kind to all, magnanimous towards Alice, and pathetic towards Mr. Iveson, only his heart was too full of his great object in life to notice her manner.

The marvellous fit of summer weather in spring still continued, and it was fixed that the party should start in the long boat, as soon as possible after luncheon. In the meanwhile the croquet was again in requisition, but Alice contrived to steal away with

Richard, for her heart was yearning for his spoken blessing.

“Dear Richard, you have met Lord Dungarret before, and I fear you were not pleased with him !”

“All the associations on that occasion were unpleasing, darling, and it is difficult to disentangle the pressure of circumstances and the worry of one’s own mind from the individual impressions made by his lordship. But I will divest myself of all preconceived opinions, and judge Lord Dungarret by what I see and learn of him from this present time.”

“That is noble of you, my dear brother. Do you think we shall be able to induce George to take a similar view ?”

“I think so. George has always been generous towards those who aided in his downfall. He only once spoke bitterly of this man, and once of another such friend,

a Mr. Aylmer ; on all other occasions he said, 'My errors have been my own, and to myself alone the blame is due.'

"Dear George ! What a brave fellow he is ! Have you spoken with Lord Dungarret ?"

"I have, Alice. He recognised me as soon as I entered the drawing-room, and offered me his hand. I hesitated to take it, for the sight of him recalled that terrible time to my mind, and the rascally efforts of extortion practised by his steward. However, he at once spoke on the subject, and I am glad he did so. It augurs better for his moral nature that that transaction should grate on his conscience, and I am thankful to find that the steward robbed him of the hundred pounds he screwed out of me, only giving the simple amount of the debt to his master."

"I am glad that was the case. I hope Lord Dungarret has dismissed him."

"I think he said that he had done so."

Heavy footsteps were heard behind them.

"Let us turn down this arbutus walk, Richard; I fear Annette is going to join us," whispered Alice.

They turned, but the ruse did not avail them. Annette burst through the arbutus bushes, breaking off several branches, and thus she intercepted their path.

"Alice, you are wanted under the willow tree," she said, oracularly.

"By whom, Annette?"

"By—Lord Dungarret," Annette replied, speaking with evident effort.

"Did he send you to seek me? He would have been wiser to have come himself," rejoined Alice, with some pride.

"No, he didn't send me. But I saw him sitting there looking so forlorn, that I knew he was wanting somebody."

"Let us hope that somebody will go to him," Alice replied, mischievously. "You and I will go to see the church, Richard."

"Heartless coquette!" exclaimed Miss Ann; "how can you thus trifle with breaking hearts?"

Elsie coloured.

"Do be reasonable, Annette. If you know of any breaking hearts, it is more than I do. I cannot go in search of Lord Dungarret. Mr. Iveson and I are going to see the church; come with us if you like, only don't rave."

Iveson looked annoyed. Annette's manner of speaking to Alice had deeply offended him, and a word she had said about breaking hearts had caused his to quiver; besides this, he was by no means willing to have his *tête-à-tête* with Alice interrupted, and he did not attempt to disguise his annoyance. Annette saw the

vexation, but mistook its cause, so she cast her eyes upwards (they were small, and of no colour) and remarked pathetically :

“Ah! Alice, exultation deadens your power of feeling for others. You stab cruelly, but not wilfully. I will accompany you on your walk, that you may not do further damage.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A WATER PARTY.

In faith he is a worthy gentleman,
Exceedingly well read, and profited
In strange concealments, valiant as a lion,
And wondrous affable.

KING HENRY IV.

“I AM very doubtful of the wisdom of your going on the water to-day, Annette, after being so ill last night,” said Mrs. Gerald at luncheon, with well-feigned solicitude.

Annette started, and began a vehement expostulation ; but an expression in her step-mother’s countenance checked her, and she only said, in a very awkward manner,

“I so very much want to go, mamma.”

“Will you take charge of Annette if I allow her to go, Mr. Iveson?” said the accomplished manœuvrerer. “She is so careless about herself, that I can only trust her in the charge of some reliable person. She must not walk at all, and she must keep her cloak constantly around her.”

“I will be responsible for her observance of those orders, madam,” replied Richard Iveson, “if that is all that the charge requires.”

“Oh! no, it is not all. Your trust includes general surveillance, and all that pertains to the safety of life and limb. I require each gentleman to be responsible for one lady.”

“If I do not bring Miss Hilary safe home, let my life be forfeit!” eagerly exclaimed Lord Dungarret.

"I will be surety for the safety of Miss Ella!" gallantly rejoined Sir Henry Armstrong.

"I am compelled to offer the same pledge with respect to Miss Lina," said Mr. Vansittart, with well-dissembled reluctance; "and I feel it very hard, for she is so mischievous, contradictory, and altogether spiteful, that she is as likely as not to drown herself just to get me into a scrape!"

"You mean a net, old fellow," slyly retorted Sir Henry; "how I should pity the man that had the landing of you. How you would flounder!"

"You must shew me how to do it in a dignified manner, Armstrong, and then I'll take into consideration about following suit."

"Is Mr. Vansittart going to take a second suit in case he has to dive for Miss Lina?" asked Lord Dungarret.

“No, only in case he has to bring a suit for breach of promise.”

“Any one who is wishing a law-suit, had better apply to me,” said Mr. Gerald.

“A fair challenge; I promise you the first I have to spare. Won’t you do the same, Lord Dungarret?”

“I will, Sir Henry. I only wish it may be one worthy of Mr. Gerald’s attention.”

He shrugged his shoulders slightly, but Harrington rushed in, crying—

“Papa, papa, and everybody, do come to the boat, we shall have it dark before we get started.”

There lay the bonny boat, sobbing lazily on the broad bosom of Father Thames. She was a shapely little craft, the glory of the master of Fair Oaks. Built of slender oaken boards, her flooring, her seats, her oars, her every fitting was innocent of any touch of paint.

Lord Dungarret gazed admiringly on her, and whispered to Alice,

“Thou blowest to the sea my blue sail's wing,
Us to a new love-lit futurity.
Out to the ocean fleet and float
Blow, blow my little leaf-like boat.”

“Who will take the oars?” asked Mr. Gerald. “We are so large a party, that we shall be better without boatmen. Harrington and I can pull, if two more will help.”

“I will pull till I'm tired,” said Sir Henry.

“And I will take an oar,” said Lord Dungarret.

“Then I will hold myself ready to do my unskilled best in any emergency,” added Iveson; and the party arranged themselves accordingly.

Annette insisted upon steering, and Ella sat by her side, having received a whispered request from Alice to do so. Alice seldom gave way to repulsions, but Annette had so serious-

ly aggravated her and Iveson during the expedition to the church, that she quite shrank from her vicinity.

Alice would fain have had Ella for her companion, but she knew that Lina would not consent to take the seat by Annette. Alice was very timid on water ; in early infancy she had had a narrow escape from drowning, George having launched himself and her upon the lake at Marlowe Chase in a sitz bath, which of course upset and endangered both lives. This accident had made a strong impression upon the child's susceptible nerves, and she had ever an unconquerable shrinking from deep water, especially in darkness.

But no memory of this haunting dread had crossed her mind, till Dungarret handed her into the boat, then, with a shudder, she thought,

“I cannot sit between Annette and the water—oh! that I might have gentle Ella beside me!”

However, Lord Dungarret managed to possess himself of the first oar on her side the boat, so he was close to her.

Down the stream they went at a merry pace, past the withy beds, where the wild convolvulus was climbing that she might suspend her snowy bells from on high, and the parasitic dodder was winding itself like a skein of crimson silk all in and out among the branches. The tall stately leaves of the water dock were bending over towards the water, as though to gaze on their own reflection; and the grassy stems of the bulrush and the flowering rush were shooting heavenwards, while the graceful swans sailed in and out beneath their shadow, and stooped to crop the weeds at their root.

“A song! a song!” cried Lina, who seldom troubled herself to sing, or took any charge of amusing either herself or other people; and her request was echoed by other voices, and declared most reasonable.

Lord Dungarret started “Row, brothers, row.” His voice was very beautiful, clear as a flute, but possessing great power and compass, and in perfect training. At his request Alice, Ella, and Mr. Vansittart joined in for the chorus.

Song succeeded song, and the fleet boat shot between the low banks along Runnymede, and round many a devious turn of the ever-winding river, to an accompaniment of as ravishing music as ever charmed boatman’s ear. Alice forgot her instinctive dread of water, until they reached a lock.

But as the boat sank lower and lower to the descending level of the river beyond,

Alice's cheek paled, and she longed for a hand to hold—only to seize Lina's would certainly lay her open to remark, perhaps ridicule. Lord Dungarret noticed her anxiety, and leaning forward he said softly,

“There is no cause for fear.”

“No, I know there is not. But I am very weak on water—I think I have hydrophobia latent in my system.”

She tried to laugh, but it was a failure.

And now the second sluice gates open, and the bonny boat shoots into the broad sunny river again, and Alice gives a sigh of relief. Again the songs begin, and mirth and music cheer their onward way.

“It will be a terribly hard pull back ; had we not better turn ?” said Sir Henry.

“Let me take your oar, you are wearied,” said Iveson, and Sir Henry did not object, although assured by Mr. Gerald that he had

sent a horse to Chertsey, from whence he would tow the boat back up the stream, so that no rowing would be needed on the return.

Iveson stepped forward, and Sir Henry took his place behind the rowers, and the boat dipped and oscillated with the motion, and Alice's cheek grew pale again, and her lips quivered.

Sir Henry and Mr. Vansittart produce wine and biscuits from a basket, and Lord Dungarret eagerly presses Alice to take some.

"A little sherry will calm your nerves," he said, in a low pleading tone.

Alice looked up gratefully in his face, and took the wine; only one bottle had been put in, and that was soon exhausted.

They reached Chertsey, but no horse was forthcoming, so they had to wait for some time, and the shades of evening drew on apace.

At last the old horse appeared, with the under-gardener on his back, a deaf old man, whom Mr. Gerald retained in his service for charity.

The rope was secured to the boat, the rowers laid up the oars, and song and gay chat freely succeeded one another as the light of day faded.

Suddenly a loud crack is heard, the boat pitches, turns round, and begins to float down the stream.

“Hollo !” roars Mr. Gerald at the pitch of his voice, while he seized an oar; “hollo! Andrew, the rope has broken !”

But Andrew is seen riding slowly forward, wholly unaware of any fracas having taken place. The party in the boat shriek in parts and chorus, while the rowers pull hard against the stream. It dawns at last upon Andrew that something is wrong, and he turns to look

what it may be, and the rope is mended. And now a stronger ripple gives warning, all too late, that a coal barge is running down the stream full upon their bow. They shriek to Andrew, but in vain ; cry to the bargeman to look out, but receive only oaths and ribald jests in return ; the tarred side of the barge grates against the dainty planks of the pleasure boat, and it is only by force of arm that Iveson and Harrington and the two gentlemen in front hold the little craft off its cruel black enemy.

Alice thought that the boat was over, and groaning, covered her face.

And now they reach the first lock. The dark gates yawn for their admittance, and shut them into the deep dark pool. Then the water bubbles in from the slowly opening gate above, and splashes round the patient boat. The darkness, the chill, and the sound of the

water awaken all Alice's night-marish terrors, and she sits trembling in every nerve.

"Do not be alarmed, we are in no danger at present," whispered Lord Dungarret, as he leaned towards her; but his very leaning made the boat move suddenly, and she started in unreasonable fear.

"Oh! that I might be put on shore! I would rather walk ten miles in the darkness than be in this horrible position," she cried.

"Nonsense, Alice; you are safe enough. Do control yourself," said Mr. Gerald, harshly.

He was a kind-hearted man, but the knowledge that they were not safe, and that he had ventured too far in the boat for the time of year, made him irritable.

Then Annette, jealous that she was gaining no attention, insisted on changing places with Sir Henry Armstrong. Mr. Gerald was vexed with her, but he disliked crossing her, because

he thought she got a very full share of reproof from his wife; so he let her take her way, and the boat curtsied and swayed with the movement of her heavy person, till poor unnerved Alice could hardly suppress a shriek. She felt her hand taken gently in the darkness, and held protectingly, and she gratefully returned its welcome pressure.

And now Annette shrieks, and her cry is seconded by a yell from Harrington.

“Andrew, you dolt!—you have taken us among the brambles!” but Andrew trots on in perfect ignorance, and the boat swings round, unable to proceed, though hard pulled by the rope.

More cries, now mingled with angry oaths. Alice trembles violently, though the firm hand still holds hers; tears of fear and agitation roll down her face, and she ventures one pleading entreaty :

"Oh! please put me on shore."

"Alice, I am ashamed of you," said Mr. Gerald sternly; "you are quite childish. If Ella or Lina behaved so, I should send them to bed as soon as we return."

This was entirely romantic on Mr. Gerald's part, and had not the least foundation in fact; but he was angry with Alice, and determined to stop her complaints. And the hand held hers more tenderly, and two strong wills resolved that, if Alice craved the boon again, she should be put on shore.

And now they near the second lock, but bump against the gates before they realise it, and have much ado in shouting to Andrew, and in pushing back to let the gates open.

"Oh! I cannot bear another dark pool; I know the road now perfectly, and it is not long—oh! please put me on shore," pleaded Alice in a trembling voice.

“Mr. Gerald, I wish to walk home with Miss Hilary,” said Lord Dungarret in a tone of strong determination. “Be so good as to allow us to land.”

“Of course you will do as you please, my lord ; but the step is an absurd one, and the long walk in the darkness will be very unpleasant.”

“I will go too,” said Mr. Iveson.

“No, Mr. Iveson, I object to that. The boat needs strong hands to care for her. We are over the worst certainly, but we know not yet what our needs may be. I cannot let Alice’s folly draw away more than one of my hands.”

“And you promised to take care of me,” pleaded Annette.

The boat touched the bank, and Lord Dungarret sprang up it, and handed Alice on to *terra firma*. She gave a great sigh of relief. Iveson leaned towards her.

"Do you need me, Alice?" he whispered ;
"for if you do, I will come."

"Thanks, dear Richard," she replied ; "I do not need you."

"The dark gates open, and the boat is shut into the rising pool. Lord Dungarret draws Alice's arm within his, and they step rapidly along the path till they reach a part where the foot road leaves the river's bank. He turns into this, knowing that it will be a relief to Alice to lose the sound of the water.

"There is much pertaining to the past you must wish to know, dearest," said the flute-like voice by her side. "Ask me what you will, I will lay all open to you. From this time my every thought shall be for your perusal."

"I could not be so presumptuous as to question you, Lord Dungarret."

"Presumptuous ! You are the light of my

life. From the moment I saw you I knew that my good angel had appeared. I have degraded my powers, I have lived a carnal life when I might have soared, for I had no motive, no aim. From the instant that I looked into your eyes, I saw a possible height of goodness and purity before me ; you flung a chain around my soul, drawing me to all that is good and beautiful, withholding me from evil. But I wish to be perfectly true with you—I wish to confess to you my past errors, that your forgiveness may heal the wounded conscience which your goodness and purity has made sensitive, and that, strengthened by your pardon, I may go on to strive for higher things. We are walking too fast for you ; now that we have left the river, the air is soft and balmy. Sit down for awhile under these trees ; we shall reach home long before the boat.”

He spread his plaid for her, and made her lean against a gnarled elm. She rested quietly, her hands folded in her lap. He gazed upon her fondly by the light of the stars; but the delicate respect she inspired forbade him so much as touching her hand, now that they were alone in the still night.

Then he told her of his college errors, his unintended, but real cruelty to her brother; he made her understand how wholly he had swayed from the line of rectitude and purity; but he spoke no word that jarred upon her maidenly dignity, or belied the harmony of the musical tone of the confession.

“Such is the past,” he said; “the present brings us together, to this new era of my life, the era of salvation. I have not asked your love, I have not asked your hand. Having read your soul by the deep craving of my own, I feel that we are one—that we have always

been one, but that the knowledge is only just unveiled to us. I feel that our union in heart, and presently in life, is the necessary result of the eternal unity of our nature. Is it not so, beloved?"

And Alice rose, and begged him to lead her homewards; and as her arm rested in his, and his hand lay upon it, he asked again,

"Is it not so?"

And she said—

"Yes."

She was very weary, almost ready to faint, as they entered the avenue, and stood under the porch. Ere he opened the door, he laid a light touch on her shoulder. His eyes looked pleadingly into hers, urging a request which his low voice scarcely articulated, and her eyes answered him. His arm slid round her, his lips were pressed on hers, heaven and earth stood still, or seemed to do so for a few

brief moments. "God bless you, darling!" he whispered, and, opening the hall-door, they entered together.

CHAPTER XV.

SELFISH AND UNSELFISH LOVE.

Beauteous river, gentle river,
River of the golden sands,
Like a silver band enfolding
Grassy leas and golden lands.
Softly, sweetly, gently, slowly,
Moving like a graceful lady
With a look serene and holy,
With a beauteous melancholy.

Cornhill Magazine.

ALICE ascended the stair, meaning to ensconce herself in her own room, and be seen no more that night; but as Mrs. Gerald's dressing-room door was open, and she saw Mrs. Gerald there, she turned in.

“Cousin Gertrude, I am worn out, may I go to bed?”

“You look worn out indeed! What have you all been doing? I have been quite alarmed about you. Of course the dinner is spoiled.”

Alice made no reply but sank into an easy chair.

“Have the others come in? Why is there no noise? Alice, has anything happened?”

“Oh, no! The water and the darkness frightened me. You know I am an awful coward on the water, Cousin Gertrude, so they put me out on the other side Runnymede, and Lord Dungarret brought me home.”

“Lord Dungarret alone? How very improper! Pray has he proposed to you?”

“Richard wanted to come, but Mr. Gerald would not let him. Don't be uneasy, Cousin Gertrude, it is all right.”

“Then you are engaged?”

Alice replied by a look, and Mrs. Gerald was satisfied.

“You are really a very lucky girl,” she said; “you have scarcely been out at all, and you secure so good a *parti*. I hope your good fortune will make you good-natured, and that you will help to secure Mr. Iveson for Annette.”

“Richard for Annette! Oh! he would not be happy with her. Richard is so delicate in all his feelings, so sensitive and retiring; Annette would torture him!”

“Mere sentimentality! Annette has money—I only wish that Ella and Lina had as much; but that great stupid girl has necessarily the whole of her mother’s fortune—half on her marriage, and half on her father’s death. This would be the making of Mr. Iveson, and the alliance would be most advan-

tageous in other respects. There is a great deal that is good in Annette, though very little that is ornamental, and I must get her off my hands. If you spoil the sport, I shall say you are a real dog in the manger."

"I won't spoil sport, but I can't help with it, Cousin Gertrude. Dear Richard, I should like Ella for him—no one less nice than that."

"Thank you for nothing. I mean Ella to marry a baronet at least."

"I think she will do so. I hope she will be happy. May I go to bed, Cousin Gertrude?"

"Wait a few moments, Elsie; Mr. Iveson begs to speak to you here in our morning-room."

It was Ella who spoke, and she startled them, for they had not heard her light foot on the stairs.

“Did you hear us discussing your prospects?” asked Mrs. Gerald.

“No, mamma, I only heard poor Elsie begging to go to bed. She has been so terrified; I was very, very sorry for her.”

“You may spare your sympathy, Ella. Alice is much more to be envied than pitied; she has secured a brilliant match—do you go and do likewise.”

“Marry Lord Dungarret too! Why, mamma, that would be bigamy, and would subject us to all sorts of dreadful punishments.”

“Don’t be absurd, Ella. Go and dress, and look your best, and sing your best. Now get away.”

Alice had gone to the morning-room as desired; she found Richard awaiting her.

“My darling Alice, I fear you are quite ill!”

“No, Richard, only so very, very tired, more tired than I ever was before. I am going to bed, and I hope to sleep for twelve hours at least. I did not sleep all last night, and I have been so terrified all the evening.”

“Then there is nothing wrong but fatigue?”

“Nothing but sheer weariness, dear Richard. And, oh! I am so happy, so very, very happy. Dear Richard, dear brother, lay your hand on my head and bless me.”

He drew her to him, leaned her head on his breast, and encompassed it with his two hands; but he whispered one little question before he pronounced his fervent blessing, and received a monosyllabic answer.

“God bless you, my beloved sister, and God bless him who is to be your husband; and

may the good Shepherd have you ever in His safe keeping !”

He kissed the throbbing forehead, and bidding her good night, he hurried away.

“ Will you come and smoke a cigar with me in the balcony, Mr. Iveson ?” asked Lord Dungarret, later in the same evening ; and Richard acquiesced.

“ I want to talk with you of my daring aspirations, Mr. Iveson,” he began. “ I have, to-day, ventured to ask the hand of Miss Hilary, and she has not rejected my petition. I prefer speaking to you on the settlement question to broaching it to her other trustee, Mr. Gerald, as you are already aware of the sad state of my affairs.” He paused, expecting a rejoinder, but was met by a question instead.

“ What course does your lordship propose to take ?”

“ It is no easy matter to decide on one, but

I have thought very anxiously on the subject, and have hit on the plan concerning which I am about to ask your judgment. The estate is saddled with a good jointure for any possible widow, so the prospect I have to offer Alice, in case of my demise, is far better than that I can lay before her in life. My wasteful expenditure has made me the prey of the money-lenders, and, as you are probably aware, I am obliged to circulate a report that I have sailed for Canada, and to go here by an assumed name, to elude their vigilance. But I have powerful friends, and I purpose at once claiming a promise made to me some time ago, of procuring me a diplomatic situation on the continent—that is, if Miss Hilary does not object to going abroad.”

“ I feel sure she will make no such objection ; it is so plainly the right step for your lordship to take.”

“I am so glad it meets with your approbation. Then I have your consent?”

“You have. Most heartily I wish you every blessing, so long as you act worthily towards Alice. But if you slight her, or give her cause to be ashamed of her husband, I will devote my life to retribution!”

Lord Dungarret looked uneasy, but his confident manner returned in a moment, and he said :

“I will live for her, and be what she likes to make me.”

A pause succeeded, which Mr. Iveson broke.

“It is time I spoke to you of Miss Hilary’s affairs, Lord Dungarret.”

“Oh, no ; it is not necessary. I know the sad story, partly from you, partly from herself, and partly from another. The last saleable property went to pay poor Hilary’s debts,

and she is all but penniless. I knew that I could not be charged with base self-interest in seeking her."

"You could not, my lord. But you are misinformed as to the facts, or, rather, you are unaware of certain changes that have taken place during this year. A new and rich vein of lead has been opened in the old mine, and it is bringing in an income of several hundreds, while on the small farm opposite the metal crops out to the day, and we get large quantities of lead without incurring any serious expense, as in 'dead work.' I can safely state Miss Hilary's income at a thousand a-year."

"Good gracious! Mr. Iveson, you amaze me. That makes my way very easy. Of course every shilling shall be settled on herself."

"Right, my lord."

“But you puzzle me. Now I remember that, when speaking of her brother to me, she distinctly said that the farm was sold, and the minerals not reserved.”

“That *was* true. The farm was sold, and repurchased.”

“So much the better. But, I say, Mr. Iveson, it must have been rather a shady business. It was only repurchased *after* the finding of the lead. Now confess—honour bright?”

Richard Iveson drew himself up proudly.

“Lord Dungarret,” he said, and the graceful nobleman trembled under his stern and searching glance, “you must unsay those words. I am a plain man, but through my whole life I have never done anything of the class you call ‘shady.’ My father and grandfather were working men, only with more wits than the generality; but every generation of

Ivesons has spoken truth, and acted honestly. *I* bought the farm in question, or, rather, I lent five hundred pounds to Colonel Hilary, for the title-deeds were never transferred. I was certain that metal lay among the rocks in that land, and pretty near the surface, too, and I only waited for means to make some trials in various places. By a mere accident, Miss Hilary discovered the place where the vein cropped out ; I borrowed money to work it, and in three months repaid myself the five hundred pounds. I have since paid another loan, and I have enough in hand for Miss Hilary's trousseau."

Lord Dungarret grasped the agent's hand in a warm impulse of enthusiasm.

"Forgive me, Mr. Iveson," he said ; "my inuendos were indeed insulting to you. Would to God I could look back upon so blameless a life, and boast such noble unselfishness ! You

are worthy the warm friendship that Alice gives you."

Iveson smiled.

"Please not to mention to Alice what I have told you, when you see her in the morning."

"I shall not see her, alas! I must leave Windsor by the first train, and her rest must not be disturbed till hours later. You will give her my devoted love, Mr. Iveson, and tell her that I shall run down to see her ere long, and in the meantime we must write—it is our food!"

Iveson groaned in spirit.

"I will tell her all that you say," he said gently. "Is that a light on the other side of the river?" he added, to change the subject.

"Of course it is. A smouldering fire of weeds and rubbish. I must go in and say good-bye to Mrs. Gerald before she retires for

the night. Will you come in, or stay?"

"I will stay and smoke another cigar," and Iveson was left in peace.

Another hour and the whole house was at rest—all but Iveson. His face was pale and his lip trembled, for a mass of manuscript lay before him. It was not a bundle of letters in their separate covers, but a book formed of sheets carefully sewn together. Some of the sheets had broad black borders, some were scrawled in pencil, some closely and carefully written. It was Alice's correspondence. Every letter Richard knew by heart; each had been carried in his bosom before he had filed it thus, and the precious packet never went out of his personal keeping. Now he felt he had no longer a right to dwell on these letters. She had evidently meant friendship, not love, in her warm words, but he could only read them by the light of his first impres-

sion, and to do so he felt to be dishonourable. So he was nerving himself to yield them up, and with them the cherished hope of his life.

His room opened on the leads above the butler's pantry, and the building was covered by close trellis-work. When the house was quite at rest, he cautiously opened the window, and descended by the trellis to the lawn. He found the boat pulled up on the sandy bank, and he carefully launched it, and rowed himself to a little landing on the opposite bank. There he secured the boat, and then made his way to the distant light. His hand trembled violently as he fumbled in his breast, and drew forth the precious documents. He pressed them to his lips again and again ; hot tears fell on them ; then he placed them on the fire. The flames caught the paper, and it blazed up, the sheets writhed and quivered, and he recognised whole passages of precious

sentiments, now more cherished than ever, but no longer his own. Suddenly the little volume rolled off the heap of weeds and lay crackling at his feet. It seemed as if it were a cherished thing that he was trying to kill, and that yet would not die, and he broke out into a heat of agony. He seized the burning paper in his hand, and thrust it into the fire, regardless of the pain, and it burned steadily away.

“Thank God!” he exclaimed, as he saw that only ashes remained; “now I believe the worst is over!”

He returned as he came; and his rest, when he did sleep, was as deep as that of the exhausted Alice.

CHAPTER XVI.

A HONEYMOON AND AN ASSAULT.

They please, are pleased, they give to get esteem,
Till, seeming blest, they grow to what they seem.
But while this softer art their bliss supplies,
It gives their follies also room to rise ;
For praise too dearly loved, or warmly sought,
Enfeebles all internal strength of thought.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.

It was late when the party assembled for breakfast on the following morning. Lord Dungarret was already half way to London, and Alice still slept. Annette directed her energies all breakfast time to persuading Mr. Iveson to assist in the charades which were to come off in the evening.

"Well, what do you want me to do?"

"Oh, ever so many things. You see gentlemen are scarce. There is a scene during a honeymoon; Alice is to be the bride, will you be the young husband, and scold and grumble at her bad housekeeping?"

"No, that scene would not suit me at all."

"How tiresome! Then I must take the part myself. Will you be the angry father and rage at me."

"I don't mind doing that, if there is no one else who will do it better."

"Thank you—that is charming! I have got a uniform for you; you are to be a general officer. And will you help us to make an ass bray?"

"That will be very difficult, but I will try. I could better ensure it not braying."

"No, could you? What plan would you adopt?"

“Tie a weight to its tail. No donkey brays when it can’t stick up its tail.”

Annette laughed loud and long, and Mrs. Gerald looked as if she would willingly have found some such specific to prevent her uncouth merriment; but she controlled her annoyance, and acted her part to perfection.

Annette rushed away to get the rough plan for the charades. Ella and Lina were deep in a private rehearsal, the gentlemen had gone out to hire donkeys for the evening’s games, and Mrs. Gerald was alone with Iveson; so she economised time by a stroke of policy.

“I must say I greatly admire Lord Dungarret’s disinterestedness.”

“I beg your pardon. I really do not see it.”

“Ah, you are so blinded by friendship. But in these days, when men are by birth and education fortune-hunters, it is a rare and

refreshing thing to see a man fall honestly in love with a nearly penniless girl, and never look aside at a girl with a large fortune."

"Humph, yes, in that sense I believe his lordship did act disinterestedly. But I did not know there was any fortune near to tempt him."

"Did you not? Annette will have ten thousand on her marriage-day, and ten more when her father dies. And Alice has only a little more than a hundred a year."

Iveson was tempted to unveil the changed prospects of Alice, but he knew that they had not influenced Dungarret, and were therefore unnecessary in the argument. Moreover, his natural reticence prompted him to keep silence for the stipulated year, and he was confirmed in his determination to do so by an inward assurance that, if Mrs. Gerald knew of her young cousin's wealth, she would lay her under

contribution. These reflections occupied Richard for a few minutes, and Mrs. Gerald chuckled internally as she thought—"Ah, I have done well to name Annette's fortune; he is carefully considering the matter!"

Fair Oaks is like a bee-hive, such universal activity prevails. Workmen are putting up a large tent on the lawn; the grooms are accommodating numerous donkeys in and about the stables; Annette is learning her own part, and instructing Iveson in his. The girls are arranging extensive decorations, and Alice sits quietly making strange garments; she looks pale and languid, but her countenance is very peaceful, and she gives a low laugh from time to time as her eye meets Richard's, and it cheers him in his servitude.

All the neighbourhood comes together to an early dinner at five o'clock, and as soon as darkness falls the games commence. Great is

the dismay of Annette, who has taken the lead in all the arrangements, on finding that she has calculated upon a moon, when no moon can appear ; but Mr. Vansittart and the boys promise to make a substitute, and great is the mirthfulness occasioned by their efforts. This difficulty got over, all is ready, and the audience are invited into the tent.

The first scene is the taking of a hive. There stands a real hive, under an orange-tree, brought from the conservatory ; Annette and the boys come with crape over their faces ; they make a huge din with pokers and shovels, upset the hive, and then rifle the honey. Harrington and Ferdinand buzz during the operation, for there are no bees to do it for themselves. They had planned to introduce real bees, as a trick upon Annette, but their mother divined their intention, and circumvented it.

In the second scene Mr. Vansittart's moon appeared—a pale Chinese lantern, with rough outlines of mountains, and a man with his head under his arm depicted upon it. Lina, Ella, their little sisters, and some young friends, came forth dressed as fairies, and danced round a mushroom. The scene was very pretty, and was loudly applauded, and Sir Henry Armstrong felt moved to leave the tent to get another peep at the fairies. The conservatory served as green-room for the less important changes of costume, and as he saw the fairies trooping in there he followed. A tall man stood in the entrance in the dress of a general officer, and what seemed another man came up to him.

“Really, Mr. Iveson,” he said, “you look quite handsome in uniform—I feel proud of you as my father-in-law. Be so kind as to tie my cravat for me.”

Sir Henry started.

"I hope to goodness Ella is not going to don a masculine disguise! I will find her and dissuade her."

He gave chase to the fairies, and soon succeeded in catching their queen.

"Miss Gerald—Ella, do come into the vinery for a few minutes."

"Then please, Lina, get the children ready for the next scene," said Ella, and then accompanied Sir Henry.

He took her hand.

"You will oblige me so very, very much, Miss Ella, if you will not assume a masculine dress. Any part that you may have intended to take in that guise I will take for you. I could not bear to see you otherwise than you are."

She promised readily. She had no intention of appearing in any but a graceful and attrac-

tive character, and her mother would not have allowed it had she wished otherwise. But she could not say this, for Sir Henry was speaking strangely, and pouring out such protestations of admiration and love, and drawing the fairy so near to him, that she realized suddenly, with infinite embarrassment, that she was receiving her first proposal.

And gentle Ella answered as most girls do, very disjointedly, very ungrammatically, in a manner impossible to put down in print, but which was quite satisfactory to Sir Henry, who returned to the tent to find a scene in course of enacting which might have been very instructive to him, had he not been so entirely pre-occupied.

Alice sat weeping in a chair, while her young husband Annette scolded and raged in the most natural way possible, because there was no dinner ready. Alice rang the bell,

and Harrington, in the guise of a maid-of-all-work, answered it; Alice desired him to bring some dinner. He said there was none. "Nonsense," says Alice, languidly, "there are always fowls in the house, and mutton-chops, bring them." But the cruel drudge declares "there ain't neither fowls nor mutton chops." Then Alice weeps, and Annette reproaches her, and becomes more and more cruel, and the general officer strides on the scene, and seizes the enraged husband by the collar, and gives him a shake for scolding Alice, in which there seems to be more earnest than fun. High words, threats, and hysterics close the scene, and the audience divine that the word to be guessed is "Honeymoon," and are much gratified at the ingenuity employed to please them, but still more so at their own penetration.

But the curtain rises again; a pale, sick girl

lies on a couch, and a countryman brings a donkey to the door. It is the scene in Hood's satire. The milch-donkey is dead, but Neddy is brought, because, though he cannot give milk to nourish the invalid, he can bray. And a braying noise arises outside, and forthwith Ned, in contradiction to the general rule of the animal creation, not to shew off when expected to do so, lifts his nose and tail in the air, and brays till the company are deafened.

The curtain fell, and the audience sat in mute expectation of the second scene. Harry came on in ample garments, duly padded, with a broad straw hat and huge cotton umbrella. He proclaimed "as how he had got a reglar tidy lot o' flesh for sale, both fancy articles and downright niggers." Then a line of slaves filed in. First came Circassians, their falling sleeves leaving the rounded arms exposed, and the full muslin trousers setting

off the symmetry of the slender ankles. Sir Henry felt jealous on recognising Ella among these, but determined to hasten to the slave-market and purchase her. Greek boys came next, the last of whom, Ferdinand the mischievous, could scarcely be made to mount upon the platform, so eager was he to watch the entrance of the group behind him. Last of all entered a negro family. The mother was a large, heavily-made woman, her scant drapery revealing splay feet and clumsy ankles, her massive arms bare almost to the shoulder. A scarlet tippet, and yellow ribbon in her hair, contrasted with her white jupe and sooty skin, and gave a very natural finish to her appearance. She carried a child in her arms, and another clung to her gown, both black as sweeps, and shivering in scant little night-gowns. All cheered the Africans, but Mrs. Gerald blushed crimson with annoy-

ance, and Richard Iveson bit his lip, as they recognized in the animal-looking negress—Annette!

Mr. Vansittart leaned over Iveson's shoulder.

“What a whopper that woman is, divested of crinoline!—hers is a case in which fiction comes far short of reality. Look, Sir Henry is buying Ella—she certainly is the best worth having.”

“Why don't you go and buy Miss Lina?”

“Because I cannot afford so expensive a luxury. Miss Lina is a very fine lady. During the three days I have been here I have seen her wear seven different dresses, and as much jewelry as the Israelites did the Egyptians out of. I have turned my eyes away from such vanity.”

“You should look after Miss Annette, she has twenty thousand charms.”

“What, Dinah! You don’t mean to say Dinah has chink, chink?”

“I do, indeed; she has twenty thousand pounds.”

“Who told you so?”

“Mrs. Gerald.”

“By Jove! did she? Then madame intended you to become a suitor! Ah! madame has diplomatic powers! Did you rise to the bait?”

“Of course not. Money is no use to me, and I want a wife still less.”

“Then I’ll enter for the race at once. By Jove! twenty thousand might bleach a dozen niggers! Look, they are putting her up. Let me pass, and I’ll bid.”

So Vansittart bid fabulous sums for the little group, and as the slaves retreated he whispered, “The get up is perfect.”

As the curtain fell, Mrs. Gerald took Vansittart’s vacated chair.

“Mr. Iveson,” she said sternly, “were you aware of Annette’s extraordinary fancy?”

“Indeed, madam, I was not,” he replied ; “though I went at her desire to borrow the gardener’s children.”

“That girl has a fatality for *désagremens* !” she exclaimed ; “she is clever, well-principled, and well endowed ; but she is devoid of womanly tact and delicacy. With her face and figure, to play such tricks is sheer madness. I am more provoked than I can say.”

“Pray, don’t disturb yourself,” said Richard, quietly ; “Mr. Vansittart seemed much amused with the whole affair, and I think his purchase had a deeper meaning than that which met the eye.”

“Mr. Vansittart ! I thought his fancy lay in a different direction.”

“Perhaps his fancy may ; but he is a poor

man, and cannot afford to indulge it. I may be a short-sighted prophet, but I augur much from his eagerness in the slave-market."

Mrs. Gerald shrugged her shoulders, and the curtain rose for the last scene.

There was an open space and a Moorish castle, and ladies were walking in the grounds ; suddenly a dozen men riding donkeys in default of mules dashed towards the castle, and the ladies took shelter in it.

An effort was made at defence, but the assailants pressed on, and presently the castle was toppled over bodily, and the ladies taken prisoners. Sir Henry and Mr. Gerald had been pressed into this forlorn hope, and they gallantly lifted their ladies on to the donkeys, and, mounting behind them, rode jauntily off the field. But not so with Mr. Vansittart's beast. As soon as he felt the added weight of Annette, he fell back upon the family

quality, obstinacy. Putting his front legs forward, and his hind legs back, he stood stock still ; in vain the hero beat and kicked him—he stirred not, and the curtain fell upon the tableau, stranded high and dry on the rock of donkeydom.

Cheers resounded again, and again the wit of the assembled guests divined the riddle, and pronounced the symbolised word to be—
“ Assail.”

CHAPTER XVII.

THE AVENGER ON THE TRACK.

If like a snail she steal within your walls,
Till the black slime betray her as she crawls;
If like a viper to the heart she wind,
And leave the venom there she did not find;
What marvel that this hag of hatred works
Eternal latent evil as she lurks.

BYRON.

As the spring advanced and brightened into summer, the party at Fair Oaks received gay visits, and time passed cheerily with them. Mr. Vansittart was evidently paying addresses to Annette, and Sir Henry and Lord Dungarret were zealous in their devoir. But no

heart throbs so painfully as that of Alice on hearing the postman's knock, for the intensity of her devotion is ever tinged with a shade of solicitude.

She watches anxiously for the afternoon post, while another woman, not many years her senior, drags out the weary hours in watching the entrance to a club. Mahala Broad is at large again, and she is determined, before engaging with a new situation, to learn as much as possible of Mr. Herbert Aylmer's private history.

Day by day she watches all who come in and out of the club where her friend the footman told her his letters were addressed, and day by day she waited in vain, that slight supple form still disappointed her aching sight. But Mahala was strong in purpose, and she kept her watch patiently.

At last, just in the gloaming, he came.

He darted into the reading-room; he was lost to her sight for a few minutes, and then he emerged as rapidly as he had entered.

He passes near Mahala, meets an old acquaintance, and pauses to speak with him. Mahala profits by the opportunity to note the changes in his appearance. Improved in every way, more manly in bearing, more decidedly handsome in feature, the greatest advance is in the radiance of his expression.

"Well, he be a fine young gentleman!" soliloquises Mahala; "it be no great wonder if poor Mercy did let him make a fool of she!"

The friends part, and Herbert Aylmer proceeds at a rapid pace, so rapid that Mahala has much ado to keep him in sight. At Charing Cross he gets into an omnibus, and Mahala takes a place inside the same.

Every time the 'bus stops, Mahala is on

the alert, and watches the descending passengers, but those slender feet keep their position on the outer ledge. Even at the "Elephant and Castle" they do not descend, so Mahala keeps her place also.

Suddenly the vehicle stops with a jerk, and Mahala is minded to rise; but if she gets out while he is paying his fare, he will see her, and it is as desirable for her present purpose that she should pass unseen, as that she should be able to watch him.

So she lets the 'bus proceed a few yards, keeping her eye on him as he darts up a narrow street; then she calls a halt; the conductor grumbles that she did not get out at the same time as the gentleman. She pays her fare, and runs up the street, gaining the first turn in time to see Herbert bound up a little garden walk, and enter a neat-looking dwelling. Mahala proceeded to take

the name and address—No. 19, Albert Place, Walworth.

She was very tired ; so when she had waited an hour, and no further signs of activity appeared about the house, she turned away, and betook herself to her old quarters, resolving to be up betimes in the morning, and learn more of the goings and comings of her late young master.

She was not disappointed. He came forth, bag in hand, and duly repaired to the main road. Again he and Mahala travelled by the same 'bus, and this time their destination was the City. Mahala had the gratification of seeing him to his place of business.

Then she went her way ; and for want of something better to do, she entered a register-office for servants, and found cooks were wanted everywhere. One was required in the establishment of the commanding-officer

of the troops at Windsor, and there were tempting vacancies in two noblemen's families. Mahala liked soldiers, and was inclined to the Windsor opening, but it was too early to engage herself.

She regained her post in good time, and was ready to follow Herbert when he emerged from his office at the early closing hour, for it was Saturday. Again she dogged his steps, and this time they led her to the Bank, and then into a Bayswater omnibus.

She had a long ride, and her spirit felt refreshed at the sight of the trees and flowers in Hyde Park; she hoped he would get out and take his pleasure there. But carefully as she watched each passenger descend from the roof, she saw no signs of his descent, and the omnibus came to a stop at Notting-Hill Gate.

Mahala pulled down her veil. She no

longer moved with alertness, but got out of the 'bus as if old and timid and afraid of falling, for Herbert was paying his fare, and she trembled lest he should recognise her. He went into the coach-office, deposited his bag, and reappeared in an instant, walking rapidly, and with easy graceful gait, westwards.

Suddenly he disappears from the path; Mahala hastens forward, she comes to a narrow road to the left, confined between two high walls, and she catches a glimpse of Herbert walking lightly along the ascending way. She follows cautiously.

A hundred yards further, and they reach a fork in the narrow road, where the wall round a villa garden comes in the direct way, and the path branches to the east and west. She sees Herbert glance in each direction, and take the westerly path, and there he is met

by a lady, whom he forthwith embraces.

“This is very good of you, Herbert—you are true to your tryst,” she hears the lady say, and she recognises the voice of his sister Isabel.

“What be her a-doing here?” soliloquises Mahala, and tries to keep near the brother and sister, in the hope of a little eaves-dropping; but she is disappointed, for they soon become aware that they are not alone, and they stand aside to let her pass. As she does so, at a slow and laboured pace, she hears Isabel say softly, “How very like the figure of Mahala Broad!” and Herbert reply, “There you are again, Isabel—girls are always fancying mysterious recognitions. Either you or Rose fancied you saw Mercy at the “Elephant” six months ago, and now you are haunted by the image of Mahala. Depend upon it, both the fair sisters are in

Australia by this time—their manners are best adapted for a virgin country.”

“Don’t you wish us was there, Master Herbert !” said Mahala between her clenched teeth, as she heard by the distant footfalls that they had turned, and were retracing their steps. She dared not continue to follow them, so she went to an avenue she knew well, just outside Lord Holland’s Park, and she sat down on a seat there, to rest her aching limbs. She saw children playing, and nursemaids gossiping, and it reminded her of the time when she nursed little Miss Rose. But the memory brought no softened feeling to the woman’s mind. She had taken many steps further from God and good since we saw her last ; the most solemnising and softening crisis in a woman’s life had passed over her, and all its holy influences had been perverted ; man’s falsehood and outraged conscience had

worked together to kill womanhood out of the woman, and their work was prospering.

She hated the little children as they played under the trees, regarding them as infant tyrants and nuisances; and she hated the gossiping maids, despising their tittering confidences, and their satisfaction in their fine ribbons; but most of all, she hated two maudlin lovers, who came sauntering on, unconscious alike of the innocent children, guarded by angels, and the dark woman haunted by demons—seeing nothing and hearing nothing but their own sweet looks and soft sighs.

The evening was sultry, the air full of fine dust. Mahala was half-smothered by the veil which she still kept down. All her energy seemed to forsake her, and she sat weary and hopeless, too bitter to be amused, too exhausted to plot revenge. The sun sank

slowly, and it was only when the cooler air made itself felt, that the woman roused herself to look once more after her victim. She rose and regained the narrow walled path, but the brother and sister were nowhere to be seen. She hurried to the toll-gate, and glancing into the office saw, with dismay, that the bag was gone!

She got into a Bayswater 'bus, changing it at Charing Cross for one bound for Camberwell. It was quite dark before she reached Albert Place, and she wondered what to do next. No. 19 looked very quiet. A widow woman opened the door to a tradesman's knock, and a light burned in an upper chamber. Mahala waited an hour, and it was not extinguished.

She turned away baffled. She sought a lodging-house, and took a poor room for a week.

On Sunday morning she was at her post of observation again.

“Him was always used to be partial to church-going and music. Him will come out soon in his best,” she said.

But she watched till all the church bells were silent. The widow came out, and went on her way, and the blind in the upper window was raised. Mahala watched more eagerly now, for the window was opening; but the head that looked from it was that of a child of twelve years old, and by her likeness to the widow, Mahala judged her to be her daughter.

“I will find the finest church, and watch for the folks coming out,” she said. “Maybe there be a backway, and him’s got out without that I did see him.”

So she sought a fresh post of observation, and waited anew.

The organ peels forth ; gentlemen, tradesmen, poor people, women and children, throng out. Mahala searches eagerly among the crowd ; but there is no form so graceful, no face of such brilliant promise, as that of Herbert Aylmer.

Spirit-worn and physically exhausted, Mahala retraces her steps to Albert Place. Ere she has waited five minutes, the door of No. 19 opens, and the widow ushers out a gentleman. Mahala is quite desperate now, so she hurries across the road and accosts the stranger.

“ Please, sir, be the lady of that house very bad ? ”

“ Not *very* bad, my good woman. She was doing very well in the middle of the week, but she has not been so well this day or two. ”

“ You be the doctor, I take it, sir ? ”

“Yes, I am the doctor.”

“Her be married, sir?” asked Mahala, pointing to the window.

“Oh! of course,” replied the doctor, and looked scandalised.

Mahala looked and felt bitter, but she determined to risk another question.

“What name do her go by, please, sir?”

“What name! Why, of course, by her husband’s. Excuse me, I have other patients to see,” and he somewhat impatiently put Mahala aside, and pursued his way.

Mahala returned to her lodging.

“I do feel in my bones that Mercy be in that room; but what for should I fluster myself for she?” soliloquised the miserable woman. “Her do live in comfort and respected; her do know, or her had ought to know, that I be wronged and friendless, and her have gived no thought to I. Let she alone; let he

neglect she, and let she lie in the bed her has made for herself." She paused, and glared fiercely from the window on the high houses opposite; then she resumed in an altered tone, but with no relenting in her hard face: "I won't let her alone; I will find her, and reproach her for her cruelty; and I will find he, and expose he to his fine friends, if him have married she; and if him have not, then there be two gone in for the same reckoning."

All that week Mahala haunted Albert Place. On the mornings of Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, she saw him leave No. 19, and sometimes she saw him return at night, and sometimes she got weary of waiting and returned to her lodging. All this time she only ascertained that he went by the name of Jones, had lived there nearly a year, and had friends in the neighbourhood. She got no glimpse of the

sick wife. On the Saturday she watched outside his place of business, and when he came forth she dogged his steps. He took a 'bus to Waterloo Station, and then a ticket, but she could not hear where to. She followed him on to the platform, heard him ask for a carriage to Windsor, and then she hurried back, took out a ticket for Windsor, and travelled by the same train.

But at Windsor she lost him. Several carriages were waiting at the station, and he must have gone off in one of them. The station was soon cleared, and a porter accosted her.

"Did you want to speak to that gentleman?"

"Yes. Does he live here?"

"I don't think as he lives here, but he oft comes and goes. He always rides with Mr. Gerald."

"Then Mr. Gerald lives here?"

"Ay, at Fair Oaks. Three miles off."

"Are there young ladies there?"

The porter laughed vociferously, winked, and laughed again.

"You've caught the bull by the right horn now, mistress! I reckon you know more of that gentleman than has been good for you. They're all alike, my dear; all gay deceivers; but now that he's going to marry, it's likely he'll reform, or pretend to do so. Where do you want to be?"

"I think I shall go back to London."

"You'd better. There's no good following him."

So Mahala went back to her old quarters, and the first thing on Monday morning she went to the Register Office, and engaged herself as cook to the commander at Windsor.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE SCENT FAILS.

It happened once upon a time,
When all his works were in their prime,
A noble place appeared in view ;
Then—to the Methodists adieu !
A Methodist no more he'll be,
The Protestants serve best for he.

CHATTERTON.

WHEN Isabel and Herbert turned away from Mahala, they continued their conversation.

“Don't be angry, dear Herbert, at my continuing to perplex myself about the two Broads. It seems to me such a terrible mystery, that those two girls, who lived with

us under the same roof, ate the same bread, and called upon our Heavenly Father in the same voice and words, should now be outcasts on the earth. There was always an evil expression in Mahala's countenance, I never felt sure of her truth; but Mercy's seemed a transparent nature, and I do not think she can have gone wrong, except under some very strong temptation."

"But what reason have you for premising that she has gone wrong?"

"She could not have disappeared so suddenly and entirely without she had a better head than her own to plan for her. My father sought her immediately, but could discover no trace."

"If you mean to insinuate that I aided and abetted her flight, you offer me a deliberate insult, Isabel, which I will not bear even from my own sister. Once for all, I swear to you

most solemnly that I have not seen Mercy Broad since last September. Will that satisfy you? "

"Oh! yes, amply. I am thankful you have said that so plainly, for I have always had a half-suspicion that you knew more than you chose to own. Your keeping your lodgings a secret has tended to strengthen this suspicion."

Herbert coloured deeply.

"Well," he said, "you women beat all for cunning, and you endow us with the same quality. Really I have cause to be flattered at my sister's opinion of me."

He spoke bitterly; but Isabel was watching his countenance, and she was not satisfied.

"Then, Herbert, as you have nothing at all to conceal regarding Mercy, you will help me to trace her?"

"Willingly, if we could find a clue."

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“ Then, Herbert, as you have nothing at all to conceal regarding Mercy, you will help me to trace her ?”

“ Willingly, if we could find a clue.”

"I shall endeavour to do so. When will you come to me again?"

"I cannot make an appointment. I am working over hours, and have very little leisure at my disposal."

"You go to church regularly?"

"Of course I do. I sing in the choir of St. Paul's, and I go to—to—the church in St. Margaret's Street in the evening."

"To that very high church? Oh, Herbert!"

"The music is my attraction. It is exquisite."

Then Isabel tried to alarm him about formality, and the worship that appealed only to the senses; but glancing at his face, she saw that he was not attending to her, so she changed the subject to home affairs.

"Rose writes in good spirits," she said; "mamma seems to be much better, and

Charlie Maitland is expected home. The village is very healthy, and the men not more drunken than usual."

"They are not likely to be—it is not 'tide-time!"

Isabel smiled at this allusion to the eras of temptation at Upper Chalkley, to wit, the Easter, Whitsuntide, and Christmas festivals, when the steadiest men thought it no scandal to get drunk; and the conversation flowed more freely.

After Herbert had left, it flashed upon Isabel's mind that the locality wherein to begin a search for Mercy should be that where Rose fancied she had seen her. This dwelt much on her mind, and finding that she was not needed elsewhere, she repaired to St. Paul's for the morning service, that she might speak with her brother afterwards, and communicate her idea to him.

She watched the entrance of the surpliced choir, examined each face, but the lineaments of her brother did not meet her view. During all the singing of the psalms she listened, analysing the mass of voices in the hope of discovering his, but her ear detected none of his notes ; she thought the anthem would reveal him, for she was sure that his beautiful tenor would be needed in some solo, or duet, but neither in the anthem could she distinguish his voice. She returned home, sad and weary, most pained because of the impossibility of relying on her brother's word.

All the week she was engaged, but on Saturday she was free, so she repaired to his place of business ; and as she walked up and down, waiting for his exit, she suddenly found herself face to face with Mahala.

She stopped and addressed her, with a grave but not unkind manner.

“Mahala, are you in any distress?”

“No, miss, I ain’t in no trouble. I’m out of place, but I have two good offers. I be only troubled about Mercy.”

“What about Mercy? Do tell me where she is—I would give much to find her.”

“It’s my belief, miss, and I’m well-nigh sure of it, that Mr. Herbert is a-keeping of her. If him’s married her I don’t care, only him oughtn’t to go keeping it secret.”

“Mahala, you wrong him—indeed you do. He told me solemnly last Saturday that he had not seen her since September last.”

“Then do you ask him, miss, who he keeps at No. 19, Albert Place.”

Mahala looked fiercely vindictive as she said this, and, without any leave-taking, she glided away.

Herbert appeared presently, and Isabel told him how she had gone to St. Paul's to meet him in vain, and of her interview with Mahala.

“ Upon my word, Isabel, you must wish to drive me mad. How you can question, and watch, and spy upon me as you do, puzzles me infinitely. I do wish you had some business of your own to think of. I shall give up going to St. Paul's, if you lie in wait for me there, and I will have nothing to do in your bothering search for Mercy. As for Mahala, if I can only catch her, I will have her up for libel. Now let me put you into an omnibus ; it is not proper for you to be walking alone in the streets, and I have a pressing engagement.”

Isabel saw that he was deeply offended, and she dared not question him further. As he hailed the omnibus, she said gravely,

“Then you will not attend St. Paul’s to-morrow?”

“I shall not,” he replied, and he handed her into the ’bus.

And all this time Mahala kept her eye upon him, and after Isabel was gone she followed him to Windsor.

Isabel’s mind was full of sad forebodings. Something was wrong with Herbert, and she could not divine its nature. The fear that he was implicated in Mercy’s disappearance still haunted her; and now she feared she had so vexed him that he would refuse to speak further on the subject. Then Mahala’s words recurred to her mind, “Number 19, Albert Place.” But what Albert Place? There was probably an Albert Place in every suburb; where should she begin to inquire?

She had ample time for reflection, for the early part of the week was full of engagements,

and she could not get the afternoon to herself till Thursday. In the meanwhile she had been able to decide upon a plan. She went direct to the "Elephant and Castle," Herbert having let slip that it was near that famous omnibus-stand that Rose fancied she had seen Mercy. Arrived there, she was assured that she was so far right by recognising the riding-school, which Rose had mentioned. She accosted a policeman, and inquired for Albert Place.

"Was it Albert Place, Albert Square," he asked, "for that was two miles off, Clapham way; or Albert Place, Kent Road—that was nearer; and there was an Albert Place in Walworth too, but it was an insignificant set of buildings."

Isabel decided on the last description, and he directed her thither.

She lost no time in consideration; she

walked straight to the door of No. 19, and knocked and rang.

A widow woman opened the door.

"I wish to see the person who lives here. I don't know whether she is the mistress of the house or a lodger."

"I am the mistress of the house," replied the widow, with some dignity.

"Then allow me to see the young woman who lodges here."

"She has gone to the country for change of air."

"When did she go? When will she return?"

"She went the day before yesterday. Mr. Jones wanted to take her on Monday night; he seemed all of a sudden to think she was dying here, though he has taken her illness very quietly; but the doctor would not let her go on Monday, and he would not let her

travel at night. So Mr. Jones took her off yesterday—it was tiresome for him, for he has such work to get a day from the office, and Mrs. Jones would not go without him.”

“And where has he taken her to?”

“That is more than I can say. They didn't think fit to tell me; which I have felt a good deal, for I have been like a mother to the bonny young creature, and the baby would never have lived but for me. But there is no such thing as gratitude in the world now-a-days.”

Isabel's heart was sick. All that she heard seemed added evidence against Herbert; and if such was the case, what a mass of falsehood and equivocation he had been guilty of! She longed to know more, yet dreaded fresh proof of his guilt.

Many a woman of less mental power

than Isabel would have fanned the widow's indignation, to have secured her co-operation; but Isabel was a stranger to intrigue, and her upright soul abhorred its every phase.

“Will you write to me when you get news of Mrs. Jones?” she said. “I am deeply interested in her, for I have known her from a child; and I am very anxious to communicate with her. I will leave my address with you. Perhaps Mr. Jones will give you her address if you ask him for it.”

“Lor', miss, Mr. Jones hasn't looked this way since she went. Perhaps he goes down into the country o' nights, but he was always irregular.”

So Isabel returned home, very sad and sorrowful. It took all her courage to nerve her to see Herbert again, and make one more effort to gain a true statement from him; she

accosted him as he left the office on the Friday evening.

“You here again, Isabel!” he exclaimed. “You are really most imprudent—no one will believe that you are my sister, and you will compromise my character as well as your own.”

Isabel replied by a look of scorn, before which his eyes fell; she then said gravely,

“Where are you going now, Herbert?”

“Home to my lodging near Paddington—there, the murder is out.”

“May I go with you?”

“If you choose. You have tormented me out of all interest in keeping any secret.”

They walked together, and when she got weary he called a cab. They reached a gloomy-looking house in a side street, he took out a latch-key, opened the door, and led the way upstairs; books, familiar to Isabel from

childhood, lay on the table, and also the desk that his sisters had given him on his twenty-first birthday.

“And has this been your home all along?” she asked.

“Of course it has. Only I kept the whereabouts a secret; so you pictured a mysterious dwelling, instead of a very commonplace one.”

“And where is she?”

“Who?”

“The lady you brought yesterday from Albert Place?”

He opened the door, and called, “Mrs. Porter!” A dingy-looking woman appeared.

“This is my landlady. Will you be so good as to say whether I was absent last night, or the night before, or at all since I returned from the country on Monday night.”

“No, sir; you haven't been out, to my knowledge, since Monday.”

“Thank you, that will do. Now, Isabel, what have you to say next?”

“That I am wholly puzzled.”

“Just so. The simple fact is that you are on a wrong scent. I know one man so like myself that even you would hardly know us apart, and there may be half a dozen such. You and Mahala are tracking one of these, and you will have as dangerous a pursuit as those have who follow Will-o'-the-wisps, and it will end in a similar result. Shall I take you home?”

“No; I don't mind going alone, if you will walk with me to a cab-stand. God forgive me if I have wronged you by my suspicions, Herbert—I would give all I have could they be disproved.”

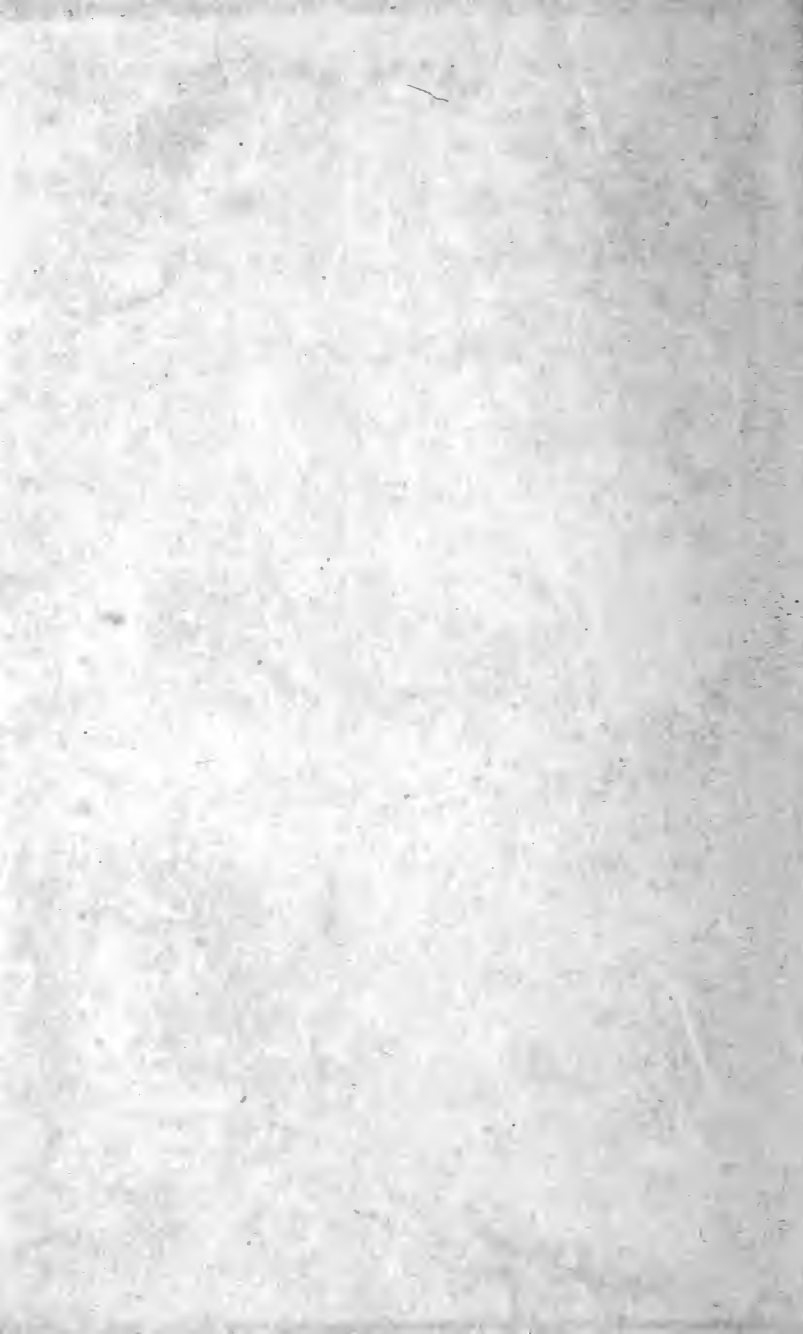
“Only time can do that; and I don't bear

malice," was Herbert's good-humoured rejoinder, and the brother and sister parted on very good terms.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.









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